

UC-NRLF



B 4 102 134



Hand Mac .

March 1855



THE
SICKNESS AND HEALTH
OF THE
PEOPLE OF BLEABURN.

by
Harriet Martineau

BOSTON:
CROSBY, NICHOLS, AND COMPANY.

NEW YORK:
CHARLES S. FRANCIS AND COMPANY.

1853.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1853, by
CROSBY, NICHOLS, AND COMPANY,
in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the District of Massachusetts.

C A M B R I D G E :
STEREOTYPED AND PRINTED BY
M E T C A L F A N D C O M P A N Y ,
PRINTERS TO THE UNIVERSITY.

PR 4984
M5 55
1853
MAIN

ADVERTISEMENT.

WHEN, about three years ago, the following tale appeared in "Household Words," relatives and friends in this country did not need the familiar and endeared name given, with questionable propriety, to the heroine, to tell them that it was founded on fact, and no exaggeration of a beautiful reality. Within a few weeks, — so far as a self-forgetting humility made partial disclosures, even in private letters, of a remarkable passage in her experiences, — the knowledge, before confined almost entirely to her kindred, has been given to thousands of readers, in the Memoir of one, who, throughout her whole life, as well as

*a**

M264486

during her blessed and peculiar ministrations in a far-distant, obscure, and disease-smitten village, deserved the title of "The Good Lady." The natural feeling, therefore, which heretofore shrank from the republication of the story, lest truth and fiction might be confounded, can hardly object now to its being sent forth on a new mission of beneficence. The slight anachronisms can be easily corrected; and though the design of the author, in clothing a noble example in an attractive garb for the instruction of the people, led to the invention of incidents and the picturing of imaginary scenes, the veritable occurrences amply justify the fictitious representations, and make the narrative true — in the sense in which it is most important to have it true — to the bright, energetic, unselfish, religious character of Mary Pickard. The portrait is a correct likeness, if a portion of the scenery and figures of the background are the creation of fancy.

So, we trust, there are no private reasons to forbid, even if there would be a natural

reluctance to assent to, the reappearance, in a volume by itself, of "The Sickness and Health of the People of Bleaburn."

But, independent of all reference to the singular occurrences which suggested it, this tale has merits of its own, instructive and important lessons, which render its wide circulation desirable. In a form that will invite and command attention, it enforces duties to be discharged, portrays qualities of head and heart to be cultivated, exhibits, either as warning or encouragement, conduct to be avoided or imitated, in every human life; for it describes that which exists substantially, and to some extent, in all communities, and may exist, in a degree, under any roof. The evils, physical and moral, of ignorance and superstition; the weakness, selfishness, perils, of panic and fear; the true use of the discipline of trial; the contrast between faithfulness and unfaithfulness in the season of temptation; the manner in which trouble reveals the good and evil of the heart; and, above all, the effective influence of a cheerful, firm,

intelligent, conscientious, rational piety, adhering trustfully to the plain commandment of duty, and going quietly, but steadfastly, about its work of mercy, — are presented with a graphic simplicity and truthfulness. No one can read it without being made better, by getting from it some hints at least of the preparation of head and heart for those scenes of poverty, suffering, or sickness, which enter into our human lot, and cannot always be escaped. How to inspire courage in the desponding and despairing; how to deal with blind prejudices; how to cheer and nurse the sick; how to change selfish terror into helpful sympathy; how to reprove by example the cowardice that attracts the very evil it would avoid; how to accept humbly and confidently the hardest tasks Providence calls upon us to fulfil, and by so doing find seemingly insurmountable difficulties fade away as the morning mist before the sun, — these are some of the lessons which will steal into the bosoms, and leave their impress on the souls, even of those who take

up this little book merely for amusement. And certainly this would be a sufficient recommendation, were it entirely, as to a considerable extent it is, imaginary, as to the representative persons and incidents.

Still we cannot and would not dissociate the story from the actual experience which suggested it; for its republication may accomplish a greater good than simply increasing the circulation and usefulness of an instructive tale. Those who read it will, we trust, desire to know more of the spirit of one, whose Christian fidelity and benevolence are so vividly represented, and be led to seek her Memoir; thus they will learn, that in respect to high principles, generous sympathies, gentle affections, unswerving fidelity to conscience, and trustful faith, the months spent in serving the destitute, ignorant, and suffering, in the daily presence of disease and death, without a thought of praise or reward, were after all no strange episode in her life, but only one manifestation, made prominent by circumstance, of a character always and

everywhere, in prosperity and in sorrow, in health and in sickness, even to the last hours spent on earth, harmonious, true, and beautiful, — Christian.

Boston, *January 21*, 1853.

SICKNESS AND HEALTH
OF THE
PEOPLE OF BLEABURN.



CHAPTER I.

It was not often that any thing happened to enliven the village of Bleaburn, in Yorkshire : but there was a day in the summer of 1811, when the inhabitants were roused from their apathy, and hardly knew themselves. A stranger was once heard to say, after some accident had compelled him to pass through Bleaburn, that he saw nothing there but a blacksmith asleep, and a couple of rabbits hung up by the heels. That the blacksmith was wholly asleep at midday might indicate that there was a public house in the place ; but, even there, in that liveliest and most intellectual spot in a country village of those days,—the ale-house kitchen,—the people sat half asleep. Sodden with beer, and almost without ideas

and interests, the men of the place let indolence creep over them ; and there they sat, as quiet a set of customers as ever landlord had to deal with. For one thing, they were almost all old or elderly men. The boys were out after the rabbits on the neighboring moor ; and the young men were far away. A recruiting party had met with unusual success, for two successive years (now some time since), in inducing the men of Bleaburn to enter the king's service. In a place where nobody was very wise, and every body was very dull, the drum and fife, the soldierly march, the scarlet coats, the gay ribbons, the drink and the pay, had charms which can hardly be conceived of by dwellers in towns, to whose eyes and ears something new is presented every day. Several men went from Bleaburn to be soldiers, and Bleaburn was declared to be a loyal place ; and many who had never before heard of its existence, spoke of it now as a bright example of attachment and devotion to the throne in a most disloyal age. While, throughout the

manufacturing districts, the people were breaking machinery, — while on these very Yorkshire hills they were drilling their armed forces, — while the moneyed men were grumbling at the taxes, and at the war in Spain, whence, for a long time, they had heard of many disasters and no victories ; and while the hungry laborers in town and country were asking how they were to buy bread when wheat was selling at 95s. the quarter, and while there were grave apprehensions of night-burnings of the corn magazines, the village of Bleaburn, which could not be seen without being expressly sought, was sending up strong men out of its cleft of the hills, to fight the battles of their country.

Perhaps the chief reason of the loyalty, as well as the quietness of Bleaburn, was its lying in a cleft of the hills ; in a fissure so deep and narrow, that a traveller in a chaise might easily pass near it without perceiving that there was any settlement at all, unless it was in the morning when the people were lighting their fires, or on

the night of such a day as that on which our story opens. In the one case, the smoke issuing from the cleft might hint of habitations; in the other, the noise and ruddy light would leave no doubt of there being somebody there. There was, at last, a victory in Spain. The news of the battle of Albuera had arrived; and it spread abroad over the kingdom, lighting up bonfires in the streets, and millions of candles in windows, before people had time to learn at what cost this victory was obtained, and how very nearly it had been a fatal defeat, or any thing about it, in short. If they had known the fact that while our allies, the Spaniards, Portuguese, and Germans, suffered but moderately, the British were slaughtered as horribly as they could have been under defeat: so that, out of six thousand men who went up the hill, only fifteen hundred were left standing at the top, the people might have let their bonfires burn out as soon as they would, and might have put out their candles that mourners might weep in darkness. But they burst

into rejoicing first, and learned details afterwards.

Every boy in Bleaburn forgot the rabbits that day. All were busy getting in wood for the bonfire. Not a swinging shutter, not a loose pale, not a bit of plank, or rickety gate, or shaking footbridge, escaped their clutches. Where they hid their stock during the day, nobody knew; but there was a mighty pile at dusk. It was then that poor Widow Slaney, stealing out to close her shutter, because she could not bear the sound of rejoicing, nor the sight of her neighbors abroad in the ruddy light, found that her shutter was gone. All day she had been in the loft, lest she should see any body; for the clergyman had been to tell her that her son Harry had been shot as a deserter. She had refused to believe it at first; but Mr. Finch had explained to her that the soldiers in Spain had suffered so cruelly from hunger, and want of shoes and of every comfort, that hundreds of them had gone into the towns to avoid starvation; and then, when the towns were

taken by the allies, such British soldiers as were found, and were declared to have no business there, were treated as deserters, for an example. It was some comfort that Mr. Finch did not think that Harry had done any thing very wicked ; but Mrs. Slaney could not meet any one, nor bear the flaring light on her ceiling ; so she went up to the loft again, and cried all night in the dark. Farmer Neale was the wonder of the place this evening. He was more gracious than any body, though there was nobody who was not, at all times, afraid of him. When he was seen striding down the steep narrow street, the little boys hid themselves. They had not been able to resist altogether the temptation of dry thorns in his fences, and of the chips which had still lain about where his winter felling had been done, and they concluded he was come now to give them a rough handling : but they found themselves mistaken. He was in high good-humor, sending such boys as he could catch with orders upon his people at home for a tar-barrel and a whole load of faggots.

"'T is hardly natural, though, is it?" said Mrs. Billiter to Ann Warrender. "It does not seem natural for any father to rejoice in a victory when his own son has lost his best leg there."

"Has Jack Neale lost his leg? O, what a thing!" exclaimed Ann Warrender. She was going on, but she perceived that the farmer had heard her.

"Yes," said he, without any sound of heart-pain in his voice. "Jack has lost his right leg, Mr. Finch tells me. And I tell Mr. Finch, it is almost a pity the other did not go after it. He deserved no more good of either of them when he had let them do such a thing as carry him off from his home and his duty."

"How *can* you, Mr. Neale?" burst out both the women.

"How can I do what, my dears? One thing I can do; and that is, see when an undutiful son is properly punished. He must live on his pension, however: he can be of no use to me now; and I can't be burdened with a cripple at home."

“I don’t think he will ask you,” Mrs. Billiter said. “He was none so happy there before as to want to come again.”

Ann Warrender told this speech to her father, afterwards, as the severest she had ever heard from Mrs. Billiter; and they agreed that it was very bold, considering that Billiter was one of Farmer Neale’s laborers. But they also agreed that it was enough to stir up flesh and blood to see a man made hearty and good-humored by misfortune having befallen a son who had offended him. After all, poor Jack Neale had run away only because he could not bear his father’s tyranny. Two more of the Bleaburn recruits had suffered,—had been killed outright; one a widower, who, in his first grief, had left his babes with their grandmother, and gone to the wars; and the other an ignorant lout, who had been entrapped because he was tall and strong; had been fuddled with beer, flattered with talk of finery, and carried off before he could recover his slow wits. He was gone, and would soon be forgotten.

“I say, Jem,” said Farmer Neale, when he met the village idiot, Jem Johnson, shuffling along the street, staring at the lights : “you ’re the wise man, after all : you ’re the best off, my man.”

Widow Johnson, who was just behind, put her arm in poor Jem’s, and tried to make him move on. She was a stern woman ; but she was as much disgusted at Farmer Neale’s hardness as her tender-hearted daughter, Mrs. Billiter, or any one else.

“Good-day, Mrs. Johnson,” said Neale. “You are better off for a son than I am, after all. Yours is not such a fool as to go and get his leg shot off, like my precious son.”

Mrs. Johnson looked him hard in the face, as she would a madman or a drunken man whom she meant to intimidate ; and compelled her son to pass on. In truth, Farmer Neale was drunk with evil passions ; in such high spirits, that, when he found that the women — mothers of sons — would have nothing to say to him to-

day, he went to the public-house, where he was pretty sure of being humored by the men who depended on his employment for bread, and on his temper for much of the peace of their lives.

On his way he met the clergyman, and proposed to him to make a merry evening of it. "If you will just step in at the Plough and Harrow, Sir," said he, "and tell us all you have heard about the victory, it will be the finest thing,—just what the men want. And we will drink your health, and the King's, and Marshal Beresford's, who won the victory. It is a fine occasion, Sir; an occasion to confirm the loyalty of the people. You will come with me, Sir?"

"No," replied Mr. Finch, "I have to go among another sort of people, Neale. If you have spirits to make merry to-night, I own to you I have not. Victories that cost so much, do not make me very merry."

"O, fie, Mr. Finch! How are we to keep up our character for loyalty, if you fail us,—if you put on a black face in the hour of rejoicing?"

“Just come with me,” said Mr. Finch, “and I can show you cause enough for heaviness of heart. In our small village, there is mourning in many houses. Three of our late neighbors are dead, and one of them in such a way as will break his mother’s heart.”

“And another has lost a leg, you are thinking. Out with it, Sir, and don’t be afraid of my feelings about it. Well, it is certain that Bleaburn has suffered more than is the fair share of one place; but we must be loyal.”

“And so,” said Mr. Finch, “you are going to prepare more of your neighbors to enlist, the next time a recruiting party comes this way. O, I don’t say that men are not to be encouraged to serve their king and country: but it seems to me that our place has done its duty well enough for the present. I wonder that you, as a farmer, do not consider the rates, and dread the consequences of having the women and children on our hands, if our able men get killed and maimed in the wars. I

should have thought that the price of bread —”

“There, now, don’t let us talk about that!” said Neale. “You know that is a subject that we never agree about. We will let alone the price of bread for to-day.”

Neale might easily forget this sore subject, and every other that was disagreeable to other people, in the jollity at the Plough and Harrow, where there was an uproar of tipsy mirth for the greater part of the night. But Mr. Finch found little mirth among the people left at home in the cottages. The poor women, who lived hardly, knitting for eighteen hours out of the twenty-four, and finding themselves less and less able to overtake the advancing prices of the necessaries of life, had no great store of spirits to spend in rejoicing over victories, or any thing else; and among them there was one who loved Jack Neale, and was beloved by him; and others, who respected Widow Slaney, and could not countenance noisy mirth while she was sunk in horror and grief. They were hungry enough, too,

to look upon young Slaney's death as something of an outrage. If hunger and nakedness had driven him into the shelter of a town, to avoid dying by the roadside, it seemed to them that being shot was a hard punishment for the offence. Mr. Finch endeavored to show, in hackneyed language, what the dereliction of duty really was, and how intolerable during warfare; but the end of it was that the neighbors pitied the poor young man the more, the more they dwelt upon his fate.

As it turned out, Bleaburn made more sacrifices to the war than those of the battle of Albuera, even before drum or fife was again heard coming over the moor. The place had not been healthy before; and illness set in somewhat seriously after the excitements of the bonfire night. The cold and wet spring had discouraged the whole kingdom about the harvest; and in Bleaburn it had done something more. Where there are stone houses, high winds aggravate the damage of wet weather. The driven rain had been sucked in by the

stone ; and more wet was absorbed from the foundations, when the swollen stream had rushed down the hollow, and overflowed into the houses, and the pigsties, and every empty place into which it could run. Where there were glass windows and fires in the rooms, the panes were dewy, and the walls shiny with trickling drops ; and in the cottages where there were no fires, the inhabitants were so chilly, that they stuffed up every broken window-pane, and closed all chinks by which air might enter, in hopes of keeping themselves warm ; but the floors were never really dry that summer, and even the beds had a chilly feel. The best shoes showed mould between one Sunday and another ; and the meal in the bin (of those who were so fortunate as to have a meal-bin) did not keep well. Mr. Finch had talked a great deal about what was to be expected from summer weather and the harvest ; but as the weeks went on, there were graver doubts about the harvest than there had been even while people were complaining

at Easter, and shaking their heads at Whitsuntide ; and when a few days of hot weather came at last, the people of Bleaburn did not know how to bear them at all. The dead rats and decaying matter which had been deposited by the spring overflow made such a stench, that people shut their windows closer than ever. Their choice now was between being broiled in the heat which was reflected from the sides of the cleft in which they lived, and being shut into houses where the walls, floors, and windows were reeking with steam. The women, who sat still all day, knitting, had little chance for health in such abodes ; and still less had such of the men as, already weakened by low diet, had surfeited themselves with beer on the night of the rejoicing, and broiled themselves in the heat of the bonfire, and fevered mind and body with shouting and singing and brawling, and been brought home to be laid upon musty straw, under a somewhat damp blanket. This excess was hardly more pernicious to some than depression was to others. Those

of the people at Bleaburn that had received heart-wounds from the battle of Albuera, thought they could never care again for any personal troubles or privations; but they were not long in learning that they now suffered more than before from low diet and every sort of discomfort. They blamed themselves for being selfish; but this self-blame again made the matter worse. They had lost a hope which had kept them up. They were not only in grief, but thoroughly discouraged. Their gloom was increased by seeing that a change had come over Mr. Finch. On Sundays he looked so anxious, that it was enough to lower people's spirits to go to church. His very voice was dismal, as he read the service; his sermon grew shorter almost every Sunday: and it was about every thing that the people cared least about. He gave them discussions of doctrine, or dry moral essays, which were as stones to them when they wanted the bread of consolation and the wine of hope. Here and there, women said it really was too

much for their spirits to go to church, and they staid away ; and the boys and girls took the opportunity to go spying upon the rabbits. It was such boys and girls that gave news of Mr. Finch during the week. Every morning, he was so busy over his books in his study, that it was no easy matter to get a sight of him ; and every fine afternoon he went quietly, by a by-path, to a certain spot on the moor, where an ostler from the Cross Keys at O—— was awaiting him with the horse on which he took long rides over the hills. Mr. Finch was taking care of his health.

CHAPTER II.



“CAN I have a chaise?” inquired a young lady, on being set down by the coach at the Cross Keys, at O——.

“Yes, ma’am, certainly,” replied the neat landlady.

“How far do you call it to Bleaburn?”

“To Bleaburn, ma’am! It is six miles. But, ma’am, you are not going to Bleaburn, surely.”

“Indeed I am. Why not?”

“Because of the fever, ma’am. There never was any thing heard of like it. You cannot go there, I assure you, ma’am, and I could not think of sending a chaise there. Neither of my postboys would go.”

“One of them shall take me as near as is safe, then. I dare say we shall find some-

body who will take care of my little trunk till I can send for it."

"The cordon would take care of your trunk, if that were all, but —"

"The what?" interrupted the young lady.

"The cordon, they call it, ma'am. To preserve ourselves, we have set people to watch on the moor above, to prevent any body from Bleaburn coming among us, to spread the fever. Ma'am, it is worse than any thing you ever heard of."

"Not worse than the plague," thought Mary Pickard, in whose mind now rose up all she had read and heard of the horrors of the great plague, and all the longing she had felt when a child to have been a clergyman at such a time, or at least a physician, to give comfort to numbers in their extremity.

"Indeed, ma'am," resumed the landlady, "you cannot go there. By what I hear, there are very few now that are not dead, or down in the fever."

"Then they will want me the more,"

said Mary Pickard. "I must go and see my aunt. I wrote to her that I should go; and she may want me more than I thought."

"Have you an aunt living at Bleaburn?" asked the landlady, in some surprise. "I did not know that there was any lady living at Bleaburn. I thought they had been all poor people there."

"I believe my aunt is poor," said Mary. "I have heard nothing of her for several years, except merely that she was living at Bleaburn. She had the education of a gentlewoman; but I believe her husband became a common laborer before he died. I am from America, and my name is Mary Pickard, and my aunt's name is Johnson; and I shall be glad if you can tell me any thing about her, if this fever is really raging as you say. I must see her before I go home to America."

"You see, ma'am, if you go," said the landlady, contemplating the little trunk, "you will not be able to come away again while the fever lasts."

"And you think I shall not have clothes

enough," said Mary, smiling. "I packed my box for a week only, but I dare say I can manage. If every body was ill, I could wash my clothes myself. I have done such a thing with less reason. Or, I could send to London for more. I suppose one can get at a post-office."

"Through the cordon, I dare say you might, ma'am. But, really, I don't know that there is any body at Bleaburn that can write a letter, except the clergyman and the doctor and one or two more."

"My aunt can," said Mary, "and it is because she does not answer our letters, that I am so anxious to see her. You did not tell me whether you know her name, — Johnson."

"A widow, I think you said, ma'am." And the landlady called to the ostler to ask him if he knew any thing of a Widow Johnson, who lived at Bleaburn. Will Ostler said there was a woman of that name who was the mother of Silly Jem. "Might that be she?" Mary had never heard of Silly Jem; but when she found that Wid-

ow Johnson had a daughter, some years married, that she had white hair, and strong black eyes, and a strong face altogether, and that she seldom spoke, she had little doubt that one so like certain of her relations was her aunt. The end of it was, that Mary went to Bleaburn. She ordered the chaise herself, leaving it to the landlady to direct the postboy where to set her down; she appealed to the woman's good feelings to aid her if she should find that wine, linen, or other comforts were necessary at Bleaburn, and she could not be allowed to come and buy them; explained that she was far from rich, and told the exact sum which she at present believed she should be justified in spending on behalf of the sick; and gave a reference to a commercial house in London. She did not tell — and indeed she gave only a momentary thought to it herself — that the sum of money she had mentioned was that which she had saved up to take her to Scotland, to see some friends of her family, and travel through the Highlands. As she was driven

off from the gateway of the Cross Keys, nodding and smiling from the chaise-window in turning the corner, the landlady ceased from commanding the postboy on no account to go beyond the brow, and said to herself that this Miss Pickard was the most wilful young lady she had ever known, but that she could not help liking her, too. She did not seem to value her life any more than a pin; and yet she appeared altogether cheerful and sensible. If the good woman had been able to see into Mary's heart, she would have discovered that she had the best reason in the world for valuing life very much indeed: but she had been so accustomed, all her life, to help every body that needed it, that she naturally went straight forward into the business, without looking at difficulties or dangers, on the right hand or the left.

Mary never, while she lived, forgot this drive. Her tone of mind was, no doubt, high, though she was unconscious of it. It was a splendid August evening, and she had never before seen moorland. In Amer-

ica, she had travelled among noble inland forests, and a hard granite region near the coasts of New England; but the wide-spreading brown and green moorland, with its pools of clear brown water glittering in the evening sunshine, and its black-cocks popping out of the heather, and running into the hollows, was quite new to her. She looked down, two or three times, into a wooded dell where gray cottages were scattered among the coppices, and a little church-tower rose above them; but the swelling ridges of the moor, with the tarns between, immediately attracted her eye again.

“Surely,” thought she, “the cordon will let me walk on the moor in the afternoons, if I go where I cannot infect any body. With a walk in such places as these every day, I am sure I could go through any thing.”

This seemed very rational beforehand. It never entered Mary’s head, that, for a long time to come, she should never once have leisure for a walk.

"Yon 's the cordon," said the postboy, at last, pointing with his whip.

"What do you understand by a cordon?"

"Them people that you may see there. I don't know why they call them so; for I don't hear that they do any thing with a cord."

"Perhaps it is because there is a French word — *cordon* — that means any thing that incloses any other thing. They would call your hat-band a cordon, and an officer's sash, and a belt of trees round a park. So, I suppose these people surround poor Bleaburn and let nobody out."

"May be so," said the man, "but I don't see why we should go to the French for our words or any thing else, when we have every thing better of our own. For my part, I shall be beholden to the French for no word, now I know of it. I shall call them people the watch, or something of that like."

"I think I will call them messengers," said Mary; "and that will sound less terrible to the people below. They do go on

errands, do not they, — and take and send parcels and messages?”

“They are paid to do it, Miss but they put it upon one another, or get out of the way, if they can, — they are so afraid of the fever, you see. — I think we must stop here, please, Miss. I could go a little nearer, only, you see —”

“I see that you are afraid of the fever too,” said Mary, with a smile, as she jumped out upon the grass. One of the sentinels was within hail. Glad of the relief from the dulness of his watch, he came with alacrity, took charge of the little trunk, and offered to show the lady, from the brow, the way down the hollow to the village.

The postboy stood, with his money in his hand, watching the retreating lady, till, under a sudden impulse, he hailed her. Looking round, she saw him running towards her, casting a momentary glance back at his horses. He wanted to try once more to persuade her to return to O—— He should be so happy to drive her back,

out of the way of danger. His employer would be so glad to see her again! When he perceived that it was no use talking, he went on touching his hat, while he begged her to take back the shilling she had just given him. It would make his mind easier, he said, not to take money for bringing any lady to such a place. Mary saw that this was true; and she took back the shilling, promising that it should be spent in the service of some poor sick person.

As Mary descended into the hollow, she was struck with the quiet beauty of the scene. The last sun-blaze rushed level along the upper part of the cleft, while the lower part lay in deep shadow. While she was descending a steep slope, with sometimes grass and sometimes gray rock by the roadside, the opposite height rose precipitous; and from chinks in its brow little drips of water fell or oozed down, calling into life ferns, and grass, and ivy, in every moist crevice. Near the top there were rows of swallow-holes; and the birds were at this moment all at play in the last

glow of the summer day, now dipping into the shaded dell, down to the very surface of the water, and then sprinkling the gray precipice with their darting shadows. Below, when Mary reached the bridge, she thought all looked shadowy in more senses than one. The first people she saw were some children, excessively dirty, who were paddling about in a shallow pool, which was now none of the sweetest, having been filled by the spring overflow, and gradually drying up ever since. Mary called to these children from the bridge, to ask where Widow Johnson lived. She could learn nothing more than that she must proceed; for, if the creatures had not been almost too boorish to speak, she could have made nothing of the Yorkshire dialect, on the first encounter. In the narrow street, every window seemed closed, and even the shutters of some. She could see nobody in the first two or three shops that she passed; but at the baker's a woman was sitting at work. On the entrance of a stranger, she looked up in surprise; and when at the

door, to point out the turn down to Widow Johnson's, she remained there, with her work on her arm, to watch the lady up the street. The doctor, quickening his pace, came up, saying, —

“Who was that you were speaking to? — A lady wanting Widow Johnson! What a very extraordinary thing! Did you tell her the fever had got there?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“What did she say?”

“She said she must go and nurse them.”

“Do you mean that she is going to stay here?”

“I suppose so, by her talking of nursing them. She says Widow Johnson is her aunt.”

“O, that's it! I have heard that Mrs. Johnson came of a good family. But what a good creature this must be, — that is, if she knows what she is about. If she is off before morning, I shall think it was a vision, dropped down out of the clouds. Eh?”

“She is not handsome enough to be an angel, or any thing of that kind,” said the baker's wife.

“O, is n’t she? I did not see her face. But it is all the better if she is not very like an angel. She is all the more likely to stay and nurse the Johnsons. Upon my word, they are lucky people if she does. I must go and pay my respects to her presently.—Do look, now, at the doors all along the street, on both sides of the way! I have not seen so many people at once for weeks past;—for, you know, I have no time to go to church in these days.”

“You would not see many people if you went. See! some of the children are following her! It is long since they have seen a young lady, in a white gown, and with a smile on her face, in our street. There she goes, past the corner; she has taken the right turn.”

“I will just let her get the meeting over, and settle herself a little,” said the doctor; “and then I will go and pay my respects to her.”

The little rabble of dirty children followed Mary round the corner, keeping in the middle of the lane and at some dis-

tance behind. When she turned to speak to them, they started and fled, as they might have done if she had been a ghost. But when she laughed, they returned cautiously; and all their brown forefingers pointed the same way at once, when she made her final inquiry about which was the cottage she wanted. Two little boys were pushed forward by the rest; and it transpired that these were grandchildren of Widow Johnson.

"Is she your granny?" said Mary. "Then I am your cousin. Come with me; and if granny is very much surprised to see me, you must tell her that I am your cousin Mary."

The boys, however, had no notion of entering the cottage. They slipped away, and hid themselves behind it; and Mary had to introduce herself.

After knocking in vain for some time, she opened the door and looked in. No one was in the room but a man, whom she at once recognized for Silly Jem. He was half-standing, half-sitting, against the table

by the wall, rolling his head from side to side. By no mode of questioning could Mary obtain a word from him. The only thing he did was to throw a great log of wood on the fire, when she observed what a large fire he had. She tried to take it off again; but this he would not permit. The room was insufferably hot and close. The only window was beside the door; so that there was no way of bringing a current of fresh air through the room. Mary tried to open the window; but it was not made to open, except that a small pane at the top, three inches square, went upon hinges. As soon as Mary had opened it, however, poor Jem went and shut it. Within this kitchen was a sort of closet for stores; and this was the whole of the lower floor. Mary opened one other door, and found within it a steep, narrow stair, down which came a sickening puff of hot, foul air. She went up softly, and Jem slammed the door behind her. It seemed as if it was the business of his life to shut every thing.

Groping her way, Mary came to a small chamber, which she surveyed for an instant from the stair, before showing herself within. There was no ceiling; and long cobwebs hung from the rafters. A small window, two feet from the floor, and curtained with a yellow and tattered piece of muslin, was the only break in the wall. On the deal table stood a phial or two, and a green bottle, which was presently found to contain rum. A turn-up bedstead, raised only a foot from the floor, was in a corner; and on it lay some one who was very restless, feebly throwing off the rug, which was immediately replaced by a sleepy woman who dozed between times in a chair that boasted a patchwork cushion. Mary doubted whether the large black eyes which stared forth from the pillow had any sense in them. She went to see.

"Aunty," said she, going to the bed, and gently taking one of the wasted hands that lay outside. "I am come to nurse you."

The poor patient made a strong effort to

collect herself and to speak. She did not want any body. She should do very well. This was no place for strangers. She was too ill to see strangers, and so on; but, from time to time, a few wandering words about her knowing best how to choose a husband for herself,—her having a right to marry as she pleased,—or of insisting that her relations would go their own way in the world, and leave her hers,—showed Mary that she was recognized, and what feelings she had to deal with.

“She knows where I came from; but she takes me for my mother or my grandmother,” thought she. “If she grows clear in mind, we shall be friends on our own account. If she remains delirious, she will become used to the sight of me. I must take matters into my own hands at once.”

The first step was difficult. Coolness and fresh air were wanted above every thing. But there was no chimney; the window would not open; poor Jem would not let any door remain open for a moment; and the sleepy neighbor was one of

those who insist upon warm bed-clothes, large fires, and hot spirit and water, in fever cases. She was got rid of by being paid to find somebody who would go for Mary's trunk, and bring it here before dark. She did her best to administer another dose of rum before she tied on her bonnet; but as the patient turned away her head with disgust, Mary interposed her hand. The dram was offered to her, and, as she would not have it, the neighbor showed the only courtesy then possible, by drinking Mary's health, and welcome to Bleaburn. The woman had some sharpness. She could see that if she took Jem with her, and put the trunk on his shoulder, she should get the porter's fee herself, instead of giving it to some rude boy; and, as Mary observed, would be doing a kindness to Jem in taking him for a pleasant evening walk. Thus the coast was cleared. In little more than half an hour they would be back. Mary made the most of her time.

She set the doors below wide open, and lowered the fire. She would fain have put

on some water to boil, for it appeared to her that every body and every thing wanted washing extremely. But she could find no water but some which seemed to have been used, — which was, at all events, not fit for use now. For water she must wait till somebody came. About air, she did one thing more, — a daring thing. She had a little diamond ring on her finger. With this, without noise and quickly, she cut so much of two small panes of the chamber window as to be able to take them clean out; and then she rubbed the neighboring panes bright enough to hide, as she hoped, an act which would be thought mad. When she looked round again at Aunty, she could fancy that there was a somewhat clearer look about the worn face, and a little less dulness in the eye. But this might be because she herself felt less sick now that fresh air was breathing up the stairs.

There was something else upon the stairs, — the tread of some one coming up. It was the doctor. He said he came to

pay his respects to the lady before him, as well as to visit his patient. It was no season for losing time, and doctor and nurse found in a minute that they should agree very well about the treatment of the patient. Animated by finding that he should no longer be wholly alone in his terrible wrestle with disease and death, the doctor did things which he could not have believed he should have courage for. He even emptied out the rum-bottle and hurled it away into the bed of the stream. The last thing he did was to turn up his cuffs, and actually bring in two pails of water with his own hands. He promised (and kept his promise) to send his boy with a supply of vinegar, and a message to the neighbor that she was wanted elsewhere, that Mary might have liberty to refresh the patient, without being subject to the charge of murdering her. "A charge, however," said he, "which I fully expect will be brought against any one of us who knows how to nurse. I confess they have cowed me. In sheer despair, I have let them take

their own way pretty much. But now we must see what can be done."

"Yes," said Mary. "It is fairly our turn now. We must try how we can cow the fever."

CHAPTER III.



MR. FINCH was standing in front of his bookcase, deeply occupied in ascertaining a point in ecclesiastical history, when he was told that Ann Warrender wished to speak to him.

“O dear!” he half-breathed out. He had for some time been growing nervous about the state of things at Bleaburn; and there was nothing he now liked so little as to be obliged to speak face to face with any of the people. It was not all cowardice; though cowardice made up sadly too much of it. He did not very well know how to address the minds of his people; and he felt that he could not do it well. He was more fit for closet study than for the duties of a parish priest; and he ought

never to have been sent to Bleaburn. Here he was, however; and there was Ann Warrender waiting in the passage to speak to him.

"Dear me!" said he, "I am really very busy at this moment. Ask Ann Warrender if she can come again to-morrow."

To-morrow would not do. Ann followed the servant to the door of the study to say so. Mr. Finch hastily asked her to wait a moment, and shut the door behind the servant. He unlocked a cupboard, took out a green bottle and a wineglass, and fortified himself against infection with a draught of something whose scent betrayed him to Ann the moment the door was again opened.

"Come in," said he, when the cupboard was locked.

"Will you please come, Sir, and see John Billiter? He is not far from death; he asked for you just now; so I said I would step for you."

"Billiter! The fever has been very fatal in that house, has it not? Did not he lose two children last week?"

“Yes, Sir; and my father thinks the other two are beginning to sicken. I’m sure I don’t know what will become of them. I saw Mrs. Billiter stagger as she crossed the room just now; and she does not seem, somehow, to be altogether like herself this morning. That looks as if she were beginning. But if you will come and pray with them, Sir, that is the comfort they say they want.”

“Does your father allow you to go to an infected house like that?” asked Mr. Finch. “And does he go himself?”

Ann looked surprised, and said she did not see what else could be done. There was no one but her father who could lift John Billiter, or turn him in his bed; and as for her, she was the only one that Mrs. Billiter had to look to, day and night. The Good Lady went in very often, and did all she could; but she was wanted in so many places, besides having her hands full with the Johnsons, that she could only come in and direct and cheer them, every few hours. She desired to be sent for at any time, night

or day; and they did send when they were particularly distressed, or at a loss; but for regular watching and nursing, Ann said the Billiters had no one to depend on but herself. She could not stay talking now, however. How soon might she say that Mr. Finch would come?

Mr. Finch was now walking up and down the room. He said he would consider and let her know as soon as he could.

"John Billiter is as bad as can be, Sir. He must be very near his end."

"Ah! well, you shall hear from me very soon."

As Ann went away, she wondered what could be the impediment to Mr. Finch's going with her. He, meantime, roused his mind to undertake a great argument of duty. It was with a sense of complacency, even of elevation, that he now set himself to work to consider of his duty, — determined to do it when his mind was made up.

He afterwards declared that he went to his chamber to be secure against interruption, and there walked up and down for

two hours in meditation and prayer. He considered that it had pleased God that he should be the only son of his mother, whose whole life would be desolate if he should die. He thought of Ellen Price, feeling almost sure that she would marry him whenever he felt justified in asking her; and he considered what a life of happiness she would lose if he should die. He remembered that his praying with the sick would not affect life on the one side, while it might on the other. The longer he thought of Ellen Price and of his mother, and of all that he might do if he lived, the more clear did his duty seem to himself to become. At the end of the two hours, he was obliged to bring his meditations to a conclusion; for Ann Warrender's father had been waiting for some time to speak to him, and would then wait no longer.

"It is not time lost, Warrender," said Mr. Finch, when at last he came down stairs. "I have been determining my principle, and my mind is made up."

"Then, Sir, let us be off, or the man will

be dead. What! you cannot come, Sir! Why, bless my soul!"

"You see my reasons, surely, Warrender."

"Why, yes; such as they are. 'The thing that I can't see the reason for, is your being a clergyman.'"

While Mr. Finch was giving forth his amiable and gentlemanly notions of the position of a clergyman in society, and of filial consideration, Warrender was twirling his hat, and fidgeting, as if in haste; and his summing up was, —

"I don't know what your mother herself might say, Sir, to your consideration for her; but most likely she has, being a mother, noticed that saying about a man leaving father and mother, and houses and lands, for Christ's sake; and also — But it is no business of mine to be preaching to the clergyman, and I have enough to do, elsewhere."

"One thing more, Warrender. I intrust it to you to let the people know that there will be no service in church during the in-

fection. Why, do not you know that, in the time of the plague, the churches were closed by order, because it was found that the people gave one another the disease, by meeting there?"

John had never heard it; and he was sorry to hear it now. He hastened away to the Good Lady, to ask her if he must really tell the afflicted people that all religious comfort must be withheld from them now, when they were in the utmost need of it. Meantime, Mr. Finch was entering at length in his diary, the history of his conflict of mind, his decision, and the reasons of it.

Henceforth, Mr. Finch had less time for his diary, and for clearing up points of ecclesiastical history. There were so many funerals that he could never be sure of leisure; nor, when he had it, was he in a state to use it. Sometimes he almost doubted whether he was in his right mind, so overwhelmingly dreadful to him was the scene around him. He met Farmer Neale one day. Neale was at his wit's end what to

do about his harvest. Several of his laborers were dead, and others were kept aloof by his own servants, who declared they would all leave him if any person from Bleaburn was brought among them; and no laborers from a distance would come near the place. Farmer Neale saw no other prospect than of his crops rotting on the ground.

“You must offer high wages,” said Mr. Finch. “You must be well aware that you do not generally tempt people into your service by your rate of wages. You must open your hand at such a time as this.”

Neale was ready enough now to give good wages; but nobody would reap an acre of his for love or money. He was told to be thankful that the fever had spared his house; but he said it was no use bidding a man be thankful for any thing, while he saw his crops perishing on the ground.

Next, Mr. Finch saw, in his afternoon ride, a wagon-load of coffins arrive at the brow from O——. He saw them sent

down, one by one, on men's shoulders, to be ranged in the carpenter's yard. The carpenter could not work fast enough ; and his stock of wood was so nearly exhausted, that there had been complaints, within the last few days, that the coffins would not bear the least shock, but fell to pieces when the grave was opened for the next. So an order was sent to O—— for coffins of various sizes ; and now they were carried down the road, and up the street, before the eyes of some who were to inhabit one or another of them. The doctor, hurrying from house to house, had hardly a moment to spare, and no comfort to give. He did not see what there was to prevent the whole population from being swept away. He was himself almost worn out ; and just at such a moment his surgery boy had disappeared. He had no one that he could depend on to help him in making up the medicines, or even to deliver them. The fact was, he said in private, the place was a pest-house ; and, except to Miss Pickard, he did not know where to look for any aid

or any hope whatever. It would not do to say so to the people; but, frankly speaking, this was what he felt. When the pastor's heart was thus sunk very low, he thought he would just pass the Plough and Harrow, and see who was there. If there were any cheerful people in Bleaburn, that was where they would be found. At the Plough and Harrow, the floor was swept and the table was clean; and the chimney was prettily dressed with green boughs; but there were only two customers there; and they were smoking their pipes in silence. The landlord said the scores were run up so high, he could not give more credit till better days. The people wanted their draught of comfort badly enough, and he had given it as long as he could; but he must stop somewhere: and if the baker had to stop scores (as he knew he had) the publican had little chance of getting his own. At such a time, however, he knew men ought to be liberal; so he went on serving purl and bitters at five in the morning. The men said it strengthened their stomachs

against the fever before they went to work (such of them as could work), and God forbid he should refuse them that! But he knew the half of those few that came at five in the morning would never be able to pay their score. Yet did the publican, amidst all these losses, invite the pastor to sit down and have a cheerful glass; and the pastor did not refuse. There was too little cheerfulness to be had at present to justify him in declining any offer of it. So he let the landlord mix his glass for him, and mix it strong.

It was easy to make the mixture strong; but not so easy to have a "cheerful glass." The host had too many dismal stories to tell for that; and, when he could be diverted from the theme of the fate of Bleaburn, it was only to talk of the old king's madness, and the disasters of the war, and the weight of the taxes, and the high price of food, and the riots in the manufacturing districts; a long string of disasters all undeniably true. He was just saying that he had been assured that something would

soon appear which would explain the terrors of the time, when a strange cry was heard in the street, and a bustle among the neighbors; and then two or three people ran in and exclaimed, with white lips, that there was a fearful sign in the sky.

There indeed it was, a lustrous thing, shining down into the hollow. Was there ever such a star seen, — as large as a saucer, some of the people said, and with a long white tail, which looked as if it was about to sweep all the common stars out of the sky! The sounds of amazement and fear that ran along the whole street, up and down, brought the neighbors to their doors; and some to the windows, to try how much they could see from windows that would not open. Each one asked somebody else what it was; but all agreed that it was a token of judgment, and that it accounted for every thing; the cold spring, the bad crops, the king's illness, the war, and this dreadful sickly autumn. At last they be-thought them of the pastor, and they crowded round him for an explanation. They

received one in a tone so faltering as to confirm their fears, though Mr. Finch declared that it certainly must be a comet: he had never seen a comet; but he was confident this must be one, and that it must be very near the earth:— he did not mean near enough to do any harm;— it was all nonsense talking of comets doing any harm.

“Will it do us any good, Sir?” asked the carpenter, sagely.

“Not that I know of. How should it do us any good?”

“Exactly so, Sir: that is what we say. It is there for no good, you may rely upon it: and, for the rest, Heaven knows!”

“I hope Farmer Neale may be seeing it,” observed a man to his neighbor. “It may be a mercy to him, if it is sent to warn him of his hard ways.”

“And the doctor, too. I hope it will take effect upon him,” whispered another. The whisper was caught up and spread. “The doctor! the doctor!” every one said, glancing at the comet, and falling to whispering again.

“What are they saying about the doctor?” whispered Mr. Finch to the landlord. “What is the matter about him?” But the landlord only shook his head, and looked excessively solemn in the yellow light which streamed from his open door. After this, Mr. Finch was very silent, and soon stole away homewards. Some who watched him said that he was more alarmed than he chose to show. And this was true. He was more shaken than he chose to admit to his own mind. He would not have acknowledged to himself that he, an educated man, could be afraid of a comet: but, unnerved before by anxiety of mind, and a stronger dose of spirit and water than he had intended to take, he was as open to impression as in the most timid days of his childhood. As he sat in his study, the bright, silent, steady luminary seemed to be still shining full upon his very heart and brain; and the shadowy street, with its groups of gazers, was before his eyes; and the hoarse or whimpering voices of the terrified people were in his ear. He covered

his eyes, and thought that he lived in fearful times. He wished he was asleep: but then there were three funerals for to-morrow! He feared he could not sleep, if he went to bed. Yet to sit up would be worse; for he could not study to-night, and sitting up was the most wearing thing of all to the nerves. Presently he went to his cupboard. Now, if ever, was the time for a cordial; for how should he do his duty, if he did not get sleep at night, with so many funerals in the morning? So he poured out his medicine, as he called it, and uncorked his laudanum bottle, and obtained the oblivion which is the best comfort of the incapable.

CHAPTER IV.



THERE were some people in Bleaburn to whom the sign in heaven looked very differently. On the night when the people assembled in the street to question each other about it, Mary was at the Billiters' house, where, but for her, all would have been blank despair. Mrs. Billiter lay muttering all night in the low delirium of the fever; and Mary could not do more for her than go to the side of her mattress now and then, to speak to her, and smooth her pillow, or put a cool hand on her forehead, while one of the dying children hung on the other shoulder. At last, the little fellow was evidently so near death, that the slightest movement on her part might put out the little life. As he lay with his head

on her shoulder, his bony arms hanging helpless, and his feet like those of a skeleton across her lap, she felt every painful breath through her whole frame. She happened to sit opposite the window; and the window, which commanded a part of the brow of the hollow, happened to be open. Wherever the Good Lady had been, the windows would open now; and, when closed, they were so clear that the sunshine and moonlight could pour in cheerfully. This September night was sultry and dry; and three fever patients in two little low rooms needed whatever fresh air could be had. There sat Mary, immovable, with her eyes fixed on the brow, from which she had seen more than one star come up, since she last left her seat. She now and then spoke cheerfully to the poor mutterer in the other room, to prevent her feeling lonely, or for the chance of bringing back her thoughts to real things; and then she had to soothe little Ned, lying on a bed of shavings in the corner, sore and fretful, and needing the help that she could not stir to give.

.

His feeble cry would have upset any spirits but Mary's ; but her spirits were never known to be upset, though few women have gone through such ghastly scenes, or sustained such tension of anxiety.

" I cannot come to you at this moment, Ned," said she, " but I will soon, — very soon. Do you know why your brother is not crying ? He is going to sleep, — for a long quiet sleep. Perhaps he will go to sleep more comfortably if you can stop crying. Do you think you can stop crying, Ned ? "

The wailing was at once a little less miserable, and by degrees it came to a stop as Mary spoke.

" Do you know, your little brother will be quite well when he wakes from that long sleep. It will be far away from here, where daddy is."

" Let me go, too."

" I think you will go, Ned. If you do, you will not live here any more. You will live where daddy is gone."

" Will Dan Cobb tease me then ? Dan does tease us so !"

Mary had to learn who Dan Cobb was, — a little boy next door, who was not in the fever as yet. He was always wanting Ned's top. Would he want Ned's top in that place where they were all going to be well?

"No," said Mary; "and you will not want it, either. When we go to that place, we have no trouble of carrying any thing with us. We shall find whatever we want there."

"What shall I play at?"

"I don't know till we go and see; but I am sure it will be with something better than your top. But, Ned, are you angry with Dan? Do you wish that he should have the fever? And are you glad or sorry that he has no top?"

By this time the crying had stopped; and Ned, no longer filling his ears with his own wailing, wondered and asked what that odd sound was, — he did not like it.

"It will soon be over," said Mary, very gently. "It is your brother just going to sleep. Now, lie and think what you would

say to Dan, if you were going a long way off, and what you would like to be done with your top, when you do not want it yourself. You shall tell me what you wish when I come to you presently."

Whether Ned was capable of thinking she could not judge, but he lay quite silent for the remaining minutes of his little brother's life,—a great comfort to Mary, who could not have replied, because the mere vibration of her own voice would now have been enough to stop entirely the breathings which came at longer and longer intervals. Her frame ached, and her arms seemed to have lost power,—so long was it since she had changed her posture. At such a moment it was that the great comet came up from behind the brow. The apparition was so wonderful, and so wholly unexpected, that Mary's heart beat; but it was from no fear, but rather from a kind of exhilaration. Slowly it ascended, proving that it was no meteor, as she had at the first moment conjectured. When the bright tail disclosed itself, she understood the

spectacle, and rejoiced in it, she scarcely knew why.

When at last the breathing on her shoulder ceased, she let down the little corpse upon her knee, and could just see, by the faint light from the rush candle in the outer room, that the eyes were half closed, and the face expressive of no pain. She closed the eyes, and, after a moment's silence, said :—

“ Now, Ned, I am coming to you, in a minute.”

“ Is he asleep ? ”

“ Yes. He is in the quiet, long sleep I told you of.”

Ned feebly tried to make room for his brother on the poor bed of shavings ; and he wondered when Mary said that she was making a bed in the other corner which would do very well. She was only spreading mammy's cloak on the ground, and laying her own shawl over the sleeper ; but she said that would do very well.

Mary was surprised to find Ned's mind so clear, as that he had really been thinking

about Dan and the top. She truly supposed that it was the clearing before death. He said : —

“ You told me daddy was dead. Am I going to be dead ? ”

“ Yes, I think so. Would not you like it ? — to go to sleep, and then be quite well ? ”

“ But sha’n’t I see Dan, then ? ”

“ Not for a long time, I dare say : and whenever you do, I don’t think you and he will quarrel again. I can give Dan any message, you know.”

“ Tell him he may have my top. And tell him I hope he won’t have the fever. I’m sure I don’t like it at all. I wish you would take me up, and let me be on your knee.”

Mary could not refuse it, though it was soon to be going over again the scene just closed. Poor Ned was only too light, as to weight ; but he was so wasted and sore that it was not easy to find a position for him. For a few minutes he was interested by the comet, which he was easily led to

regard as a beautiful sight, and then he begged to be laid down again.

The sun was just up when Mary heard the tap at the door below, which came every morning at sunrise. She put her head out of the window, and said softly that she was coming, — would be down in two minutes. She laid poor Ned beside his brother, and covered him with the same shawl; drew off the old sheets and coverlid from the bed of shavings, bundled them up with such towels as were in the room, and put them out of the window, Warrender being below, ready to receive them. She did not venture to let the poor mother see them, delirious as she was. Softly did Mary tread on the floor, and go down the creaking stair. When she reached the street, she drew in, with a deep sigh, the morning air.

“The poor children’s bedding,” she said to Warrender.

“They are gone?” he inquired. “What, both?”

“One just before midnight. The other

half an hour ago. And their mother will follow soon."

"The Lord have mercy upon us," said Warrender, solemnly.

"I think it is mercy to take a family thus together," replied Mary. "But I think of poor Aunty. If I could find any one to sit here for half an hour, I would go to her, and indeed I much wish it."

"There is a poor creature would be glad enough to come, ma'am, if she thought you would countenance it. A few words will tell you the case. She is living with Simpson, the baker's man, without being his wife. Widow Johnson was very stern with her, and with her daughter, Billiter, for being neighborly with the poor girl,—though people do say that Simpson deceived her cruelly. I am sure, if I might fetch Sally, she would come, and be thankful; and —"

"O, ask her to come and help me! If she has done wrong, that is the more reason why she should do what good she can. How is Ann?"

“ Pretty well. Rather worn, as we must all expect to be. She never stood so many hours at the wash-tub, any one day, as she does now every day : but then, as she says, there never was so much reason.”

“ And you, yourself ? ”

“ I am getting through, ma’am, thank you. I seem to see the end of the white-washing, for one thing. They have sent us more brushes of the right sort from O——, and I should like, if I could, to get two or three boys into training. They might do the outhouses and the lower parts, where there are fewest sick, while I am up stairs. But, for some reason or other, the lads are shy of me. There is some difference already, I assure you, ma’am, both as to sight and smell ; but there might be more, if I could get better help.”

“ And you are careful, I hope, for Ann’s sake, to put all the linen first into a tub of water outside.”

“ Yes, surely. I got the carpenter’s men to set a row of tubs beside our door, and to promise to change the water once a day.

I laughed at them for asking if they could catch the fever that way : and they are willing enough to oblige where there 's no danger. Simpson offered to look to our boiler as he goes to the bakehouse, when, as he says, Ann and I ought to be asleep. I let him do it and thank him ; but it is not much that we sleep, or think of sleeping, just now."

" Indeed," said Mary, "you have had a hard life of it, and without pay or reward, I am afraid. I never saw such —"

" Why, ma'am," said Warrender, "you are the last person to say those sort of things. However, it is not a time for praising one another, when there are signs in the heaven, and God's wrath on earth."

" You saw the comet, did you ? How beautiful it is ! It will cheer our watch at nights now. Ah ! you see I don't consider it any thing fearful, or a sign of any thing but that, having a new sort of stars brought before our eyes to admire, we don't understand all about the heavens yet, though we know a good deal ; and just so with the

fever : it is a sign, not of wrath, as I take it, but that the people here do not understand how to keep their health. They have lived in dirt, and damp, and closeness, some hungry and some drunken : and when unusual weather comes, a wet spring and a broiling summer, down they sink under the fever. Do you know, I dare not call this God's wrath."

Warrender did not like to say it, but the thought was in his mind, why people were left so ignorant and so suffering. Mary was quick at reading faces, and she answered the good fellow's mind, while she helped to hoist the bundle of linen on his shoulder.

"We shall see, Warrender, whether the people can learn by God's teaching. He is giving us a very clear and strong lesson now."

Warrender touched his hat in silence, and walked away.

Aunt had for some time been out of danger from the fever, or Mary could not have left her to attend on the Billiters, ur-

gent as was their need. But her weakness was so great that she had to be satisfied to lie still all day in the intervals of Mary's little visits. Poor Jem brought her this and that, when she asked for it, but he was more trouble than help, from his incurable determination to shut all doors and windows, and keep a roaring fire : he did every thing else, within his power, that his mother desired him, but on these points he was immovable. If ever his mother closed her eyes, he took the opportunity to put more wood on the fire ; and he looked so grievously distressed if requested to take it off again, that at last he was let alone. Mary was fairly accustoming him to occupy himself in bringing pails of water and carrying away all refuse, when she was summoned to the Billiters ; but the hint was given, and the neighbors saw that they need no longer use water three or four times over for washing, while poor Jem was happy to carry it away, rinse the pails, and bring fresh. His cousin Mary had often of late found him thus engaged : but

this morning he was at home, cowering in a chair. When she set the windows open, he made no practical objection; and the fire was actually out. Mary was not therefore surprised at Aunt's reply to her inquiries.

"I am tolerably easy myself, my dear, but I can't tell what has come over Jem; it seems to me that somebody must have been giving him drink, he staggered so when he crossed the room half an hour ago; yet I hardly think he would take it, he has such a dislike to every thing strong. What a thing it is that I am lying here, unable to stir to see about it myself!"

"We will see about it," said Mary, going to poor Jem. "I neither think he would touch drink, nor that any body would play such a trick with him at such a time. No," she went on, when she had felt his pulse and looked well at his face, "it is not drink; it is illness."

"The fever," groaned the mother.

"I think so. Courage, Aunt! we will

nurse him well: and the house is wholesome now, you know. You are through the fever: and his chance is a better one than yours, the house is so much more airy, and I have more experience."

"But, Mary, you cannot go on for ever, without sleep or rest, in this way. What is to be done, I don't see."

"I do, Aunty. I am very well to-day. To-morrow will take care of itself. I must get Jem to bed; and if he soon seems to be moaning and restless, you must mind it as little as you can. It is very miserable, as you have good reason to know; but—"

"I know something that you do not, I see," said Aunty. "A more patient creature than my poor Jem does not live in Bleaburn, nor anywhere else."

"What a good chance that gives him!" observed Mary, "and what a blessing it is, for himself and for you! I must go to my cousin now presently; and I will send the doctor to see Jem."

The poor fellow allowed himself to be

undressed ; and let his head fall on his bolster, as if it could not have kept up a minute longer. He was fairly down in the fever.

CHAPTER V.



THAT evening Mary felt more at leisure and at rest than for weeks past. There was nothing to be done for Mrs. Billiter but to watch beside her; and the carpenter had had his whispered orders in the street for the coffins for the two little boys. The mother had asked no questions, and had appeared to be wandering too much to take notice of any thing passing before her eyes. Now she was quiet, and Mary felt the relief. She had refreshed herself (and she used to tell, in after years, what such refreshments were worth) with cold water, and a clean wrapper, and a mutton-chop, sent hot from the Plough and Harrow for the Good Lady (with some wine, which she kept for the convalescents), and she

was now sitting back in her chair beside the open window, through which fell a yellow glow of reflected sunshine from the opposite heights. All was profoundly still. When she had once satisfied her conscience that she ought not to be plying her needle because her eyes were strained for want of sleep, she gave herself up to the enjoyment — for she really was capable of enjoyment through every thing — of watching the opposite precipice; how the shadow crept up it; and how the sunny crest seemed to grow brighter; and how the swallows darted past their holes, and skimmed down the hollow once more before night should come on. Struck, at last, by the silence, she turned her head, and was astonished at the change she saw. Her cousin lay quiet, looking as radiant as the sunset itself; her large black eyes shining, unoppressed by the rich light; her long dark hair on each side the wasted face, and waving down to the white hands which lay outside the quilt. Their eyes met, full and clear; and Mary knew that her cousin's mind was now clear, like the gaze of her eyes.

"I see it all now," said the dying woman, gently.

"What do you see, love?"

"I see the reason of every thing that I did not understand before." And she began to speak of her life and its events, and went on with a force and clearness, and natural eloquence, — yet more, with a simple piety, — which Mary was wont to speak of afterwards as the finest revelation of a noble soul that she had ever unexpectedly met with. Mrs. Billiter knew that her little boys were dead; she knew, by some means or other, all the horrors by which she was surrounded; and she knew that she was about to die. Yet the conversation was a thoroughly cheerful one. The faces of both were smiling; the voices of both were lively, though that of the dying woman was feeble. After summing up the experience of her life, and declaring what she expected to experience next, and leaving a message for her mother, she said there was but one thing more; she "should like to receive the sacrament." Mary wrote

a note in pencil to Mr. Finch, and sent it by Sally, who had been hovering about ever since the morning, in the hope of being of further use, but who was glad now to get out of sight, that her tears might have way; for she felt that she was about to lose the only friend who had been kind to her (in a way she could accept) since Simpson had put her off from the promised marriage.

“She is sorry to part with me,” said that dying friend. “Cousin Mary, you do not think, as my mother does, that I have done wrong in noticing Sally, do you?”

“No; I think you did well. And I think your mother will be kind to her, for your sake, from this time forward. Sickness and death open our eyes to many things, you know, cousin.”

“Ay, they do. I see it all now.”

Sally was sorely ashamed to bring back Mr. Finch’s message. Well as she knew that time was precious, she lingered with it at the door.

Mr. Finch was sorry, but he was too

busy. He hoped he should not be sent for again; for he could not come.

"Perhaps, Miss," said Sally, with swimming eyes, "it might have been better to send somebody else than me. Perhaps, if you sent somebody else —"

"I do not think that, Sally. However, if you will remain here, I will go myself. It does not matter what he thinks of me, a stranger in the place; and perhaps none of his flock could so well tell him that this is a duty which he cannot refuse."

Mary had not walked up the street for several weeks. Though her good influence was in almost every house, in the form of cleanliness, fresh air, cheerfulness, and hope, she had been seen only when passing from one sick-room to another, among a cluster of houses near her aunt's. She supposed it might be this disuse which made every thing appear strange; but it was odd scarcely to feel her limbs when she walked, and to see the people and houses like so many visions. She had no feeling of illness, however, and she said to herself, that

some time or other she should get a good long sleep; and then every thing would look and feel as it used to do.

As she passed along the street, the children at play ran into the houses to say that the Good Lady was coming; and the healthy and the convalescent came out on their door-steps, to bid God bless her; and the sick who were sensible enough to know what was going on, bade God bless her from their beds.

What influence the Good Lady used with the clergyman there is no saying, as the conversation was never reported by either of them; but she soon came back bright and cheerful, saying that Mr. Finch would follow in an hour. She had stepped in at Warrender's, to beg the father and daughter to come and communicate with the dying woman. They would come: and Sally would go, she was sure, and take Ann Warrender's place at the wash-tub at home; for there were several sick people in want of fresh linen before night. Poor Sally went sobbing through the

streets. She understood the Good Lady's kindness in sending her away, and on a work of usefulness, because she, alas! could not receive the communion. She was living in sin; and when two or three were gathered together in the name of Christ, she must be cast out.

There was little comfort in the service, unless, as the by-standers hoped, the sick woman was too feeble and too much absorbed in her own thoughts to notice some things that dismayed them. Mrs. Billiter was, indeed, surprised at first at the clergyman's refusal to enter the chamber. He would come no farther than the door. Mary saw at a glance that he was in no condition to be reasoned with, and that she must give what aid she could to get the administration over as decently as possible. Happily, he made the service extremely short. The little that there was, he read wrong: but Mrs. Billiter (and she alone) was not disturbed by this. Whether it was that the deadening of the ear had begun, or that Mr. Finch spoke indistinctly, and

was chewing spices all the time, or that the observance itself was enough for the poor woman, it seemed all right with her. She lay with her eyes still shining, her wasted hands clasped, and a smile on her face, quite easy and content; and when Mr. Finch was gone, she told Mary again that she saw it all now, and was quite ready. She was dead within an hour.

As for Warrender, he was more disturbed than any one had seen him since the breaking out of the fever.

"Why, there it is before his eyes in the Prayer-book," said he, "that clergymen 'shall diligently from time to time (but especially in the time of pestilence, or other infectious sickness) exhort their parishioners to the often receiving of the holy communion': and instead of this, he even shuts up the church on Sundays."

"He is not the first who has done that," said Mary. "It was done in times of plague, as a matter of precaution."

"But, Miss, should not a clergyman go all the more among the people, and not the

less, for their having no comfort of worship?"

"Certainly: but you see how it is with Mr. Finch, and you and I cannot alter it. He has taken a panic; and I am sure he is the one most to be pitied for that. I can tell you, too, between ourselves, that Mr. Finch judges himself, at times, as severely as we can judge him; and is more unhappy about being of so little use to his people than his worst enemy could wish him."

"Then, ma'am, why does not he pluck up a little spirit, and do his duty?"

"He has been made too soft, he says, by a fond mother, who is always sending him cordials and spices against the fever. We must make some allowance, and look another way. Let us be thankful that you and Ann are not afraid. If our poor neighbors have not all that we could wish, they have clean bedding and clothes, and lime-washed rooms, fresh and sweet compared with any thing they have known before."

"And," thought Warrender, though he did not say it, but only touched his hat as

he went after his business, "one as good as any clergyman to pray by their bedsides, and speak cheerfully to them of what is to come. When I go up the stair, I might know who is praying by the cheerfulness of the voice. I never saw such a spirit in any woman, — never. I have never once seen her cast down, ever so little. If there is a tear in her eye, for other people's sake, there is a smile on her lips, because her heart tells her that every thing that happens is all right."

This night Mary was to have slept. She herself had intended it, warned by the strange feelings which had come over her as she walked up the street: and it would gratify Aunt's feelings that the corpse should not be left. She intended to lie down and sleep beside the still and unbreathing form of the cousin whose last hours had been so beautiful in her eyes. But Aunt's feelings were now tried in another direction. Unable to move, Aunt was sorely distressed by Jem's moanings and restlessness; and Mary was the only

one who could keep him quiet in any degree. So, without interval, she went to her work of nursing again. Next, the funeral of Mrs. Billiter, and two or three more, fixed for the same day, were put off, because Mr. Finch was ill. And when Mr. Finch was ill, he sent to beg the Good Lady to come immediately and nurse him. After writing to his own family, to desire some of them to come and take charge of him, she did go to him : but not to remain day and night, as she did with the poor who had none to help them. She saw that all was made comfortable about him, gave him his medicines at times, and always spoke cheerfully. But it was as she saw from the beginning. He was dying of fear, and of the intemperate methods of precaution which he had adopted, and of dissatisfaction with himself. His nervous depression from the outset was such as to predispose him to disease, and to allow him no chance under it. He was sinking when his mother and sister arrived, pale and tearful, to nurse him : and it did no good that

they isolated the house, and locked the doors, and took things in by the window, after being fumigated by a sentinel outside. The doctor laughed as he asked them whether they would not be more glad to see him, if he came down the chimney, instead of their having to unlock the door for him. He wondered they had not a vinegar bath for him to go overhead in, before entering their presence. The ladies thought this shocking levity ; and they did not conceal their opinion. The doctor then spoke gravely enough of the effects of fear on the human frame. With its effects on the conscience, and on the peace of the mind, he said he had nothing to do. That was the department of the physician of souls. (His hearers were unconscious of the mournful satire conveyed in these words.) His business was with the effect of fear on the nerves and brain, exhausting through them the resources of life. He declared that Mr. Finch would probably have been well at that moment, if he had gone about as freely as other persons among the sick,

more interested in getting them well than afraid of being ill himself; and, for confirmation, he pointed to the Good Lady and the Warrenders, who had now for two months run all sorts of risks, and showed no sign of fever. 'They were fatigued, he said; too much so; as he was himself; and something must be done to relieve Miss Pickard especially; but —'

"Who is she?" inquired the ladies. "Why is she so prominent here?"

"As for who she is," replied he, "I only know that she is an angel."

"Come down out of the clouds, I suppose."

"Something very like it. She dropped into our hollow one August evening, — nobody knows whence nor why. As for her taking the lead here, I imagine it is because there was nobody else to do it."

"But has she saved many lives, do you think?"

"Yes, of some that are too young to be aware what they owe her; and of some yet unborn. She could not do much for those

who were down in the fever before she came: except, indeed, that it is much to give them a sense of relief and comfort of body (though short of saving life) and peace of mind, and cheerfulness of heart. But the great consequences of her presence are to come. When I see the great change that is taking place in the cottages here, and in the clothes of the people, and their care of their skins, and their notions about their food, I feel disposed to believe that this is the last plague that will ever be known in Bleaburn."

"Plague! O horrid!" exclaimed the shuddering sister.

"Call it what you will," the doctor replied. "The name matters little when the thing makes itself so clear. Yes, by the way, it may matter much with such a patient as we have within there. Pray, whatever you do, don't use the word 'plague' within his hearing. You must cheer him up; only that you sadly want cheering yourselves. I think an hour a day of the Good Lady's smile would be the best prescription for you all."

“Do you think she would come? We should be so obliged to her if she would!”

“And she should have a change of dress lying ready in the passage-room,” declared the young lady. “I think she is about my size. Do ask her to come.”

“When I see that she is not more wanted elsewhere,” replied the doctor. “I need not explain, however, that that smile of hers is not an effect without a cause. If we could find out whether we have any thing of the same cause in ourselves, we might have a cheerfulness of our own, without troubling her to come and give us some.”

The ladies thought this odd, and did not quite understand it, and agreed that they should not like to be merry and unfeeling in a time of affliction; so they cried a great deal when they were not in the sick-room. They derived some general idea, however, from the doctor's words, that cheerfulness was good for the patient; and they kept assuring him, in tones of forced vivacity, that there was no danger, and that the doctor said he would be well very soon. The

patient groaned, remembering the daily funerals of the last few weeks; and the only consequence was that he distrusted the doctor. He sank more rapidly than any other fever patient in the place. In a newspaper paragraph, and on a monumental tablet, he was described as a martyr to his sacred office in a season of pestilence; and his family called on future generations to honor him accordingly.

"I am sorry for the poor young man," observed the host at the Plough and Harrow; "he did very well while nothing went wrong; but he had no spirit for trying times."

"Who has?" murmured Farmer Neale. "Any man's heart may die within him that looks into the churchyard now."

"There's a woman's that does not," observed the host; "I saw the Good Lady crossing the churchyard this very morning, with a basket of physic bottles on her arm —"

"Ah! she goes to help to make up the medicines every day now," the hostess ex-

plained, "since the people began to suspect foul play in their physic."

"Well; she came across the bit of grass that is left, and looked over the rows of graves, — not smiling exactly, but as if there was not a sad thought from top to bottom of her mind, — much as she might look if she was coming away from her own wedding."

"What is that about 'sweet hopes,' in the newspaper?" asked Neale; "about some 'sweet hopes' that Mr. Finch had? Was he going to be married?"

"By that, I should think he was in love," said the host: "and that may excuse some backwardness in coming forward, you know."

"The Good Lady is to be married, when she gets home to America," the hostess declared. "Yes, 't is true. Widow Johnson told the doctor so."

"What *will* her lover say to her risking her life, and spending her time in such a way, here?" said Neale.

"She tells her aunt that he will only wish

he was here to help her. He is a clergyman. ‘O,’ says she, ‘he will only wish he was here to help us.’ ”

“I am sure I wish he was,” sighed Neale. “I wonder what sort of a man will be sent us next. I hope he will be something unlike poor Mr. Finch.”

“I think you will have your wish,” said the landlord. “No man of Mr. Finch’s sort would be likely to come among us at such a time.”

•

CHAPTER VI.



THE new clergyman was, as the landlord had supposed he would be, a very different person from Mr. Finch. If he had not been a fearless man, he would not have come: much less would he have brought his wife, which he did. The first sight of this respectable couple, middle-aged, business-like, and somewhat dry in their manner, tended to give sobriety to the tone of mind of the Bleaburn people; a sobriety which was more and more wanted from day to day; while certainly the aspect of Bleaburn was enough to discourage the new residents, let their expectations have been as dismal as they might.

Mr. and Mrs. Kirby arrived when Bleaburn was at its lowest point of depression

and woe. The churchyard was now so full that it could not be made to hold more; and ten or eleven corpses were actually lying unburied, infecting half a dozen cottages, from this cause. There was an actual want of food in the place,—so few were able to earn wages. Farmer Neale did all he could to tempt his neighbors to work for him; for no strangers would come near a place which was regarded as a pesthouse; but the strongest arm had lost its strength; and the men, even those who had not had the fever, said they felt as if they could never work again. The women went on, as habitual knitters do, knitting early and late, almost night and day; but there was no sale. Even if their wares were avouched to have been passed through soap and water before they were brought to O——, still no one would run the slightest risk for the sake of hose and comforters; and week after week, word was sent that nothing was sold: and at last, that it would be better not to send any more knitted goods. In the midst of all this distress, there was no

one to speak to the people; no one to keep their minds clear and their hearts steady. For many weeks, there had not been a prayer publicly read, nor a psalm sung. Meanwhile, the great comet appeared nightly, week after week. It seemed as if it would never go away; and there was a general persuasion that the comet was sent for a sign to Bleaburn alone, and not at all for the rest of the earth, or of the universe; and that the fever would not be stayed while the sign remained in the sky. It would have been well if this had been the worst. The people, always rude, were now growing desperate; and they found, as desperate people usually do, an object near at hand to vent their fury upon. They said that it was the doctor's business to make them well: that he had not made them well: that so many had died, that any body might see how foul means had been used; and that at last some of the doctor's tricks had come out. Two of Dick Taylor's children had been all but choked, by some of the doctor's physic; and they might have died,

if the Good Lady had not chanced to have been there at the moment, and known what to do. And the doctor tried to get off with saying that it was a mistake, and that that physic was never made to go down any body's throat. They said, too, that it was only in this doctor's time that there had been such a fever. There was none such in the late doctor's time; nor now, in other places,—at least, not so bad. It was nothing like so bad at O——. The doctor had spoken lightly of the comet: he had made old Nan Dart burn the bedding that her grandmother left her,—the same that so many of her family had died on: and, though he gave her new bedding, it could never be the same to her as the old. But there was no use talking. The doctor was there to make them well; and instead of doing that, he made two out of three die, of those that had the fever. Such grumblings broke out into storm; and when Mr. and Mrs. Kirby descended into the hollow which their friends feared would be their tomb, they found the whole remaining pop-

ulation of the place blocking up the street before the doctor's house, and smashing his phials, and making a pile of his pill-boxes and little drawers, as they were handed out of his surgery window. A woman had brought a candle at the moment to fire the pill-boxes: and she kneeled down to apply the flame. The people had already broken bottles enough to spill a good deal of queer stuff; and some of this stuff was so queer as to blaze up, half as high as the houses, as quick as thought. The flame ran along the ground, and spread like magic. The people fled, supposing this the doings of the comet and the doctor together. Off they went, up and down, and into the houses whose doors were open. But the woman's clothes were on fire. She would have run too; but Mr. Kirby caught her arm, and his firm grasp made her stand, while Mrs. Kirby wrapped her camlet cloak about the part that was on fire. It was so quickly done, in such a moment of time, that the poor creature was not much burned,—not at all dangerously; and the new pas-

tor was at once informed of the character of the charge he had undertaken.

That very evening Warrender was sent through the village, as crier, to give a notice, to which every ear was open. Mr. Kirby having had medical assurance that it was injurious to the public health that more funerals should take place in the churchyard, and that the bodies should lie unburied, would next day bury the dead above the brow, on a part of Furzy Knoll, selected for the purpose. For any thing unusual about this proceeding, Mr. Kirby would be answerable, considering the present state of the village of Bleaburn. A wagon would pass through the village at six o'clock the next morning; and all who had a coffin in their houses were requested to bring it out, for solemn conveyance to the new burial-ground: and those who wished to attend the interment must be on the ground at eight o'clock.

All ears were open again the next morning, when the cart made its slow progress down the street; and some went out to see.

It was starlight: and from the east came enough of dawn to show how the vehicle looked with the pall thrown over it. Now and then, as it passed a space between the houses, a puff of wind blew aside the edge of the pall, and then the coffins were seen within, ranged one upon another, — quite a load of them. It stopped for a minute at the bottom of the street; and it was a relief to the listeners to hear Warrender tell the driver that there were no more, and that he might proceed up to the brow. After watching the progress of the cart till it could no longer be distinguished from the wall of gray rock along which it was ascending, those who could be spared from tending the sick put on such black as they could muster, to go to the service.

It was, happily, a fine morning; — as fine a November morning as could be seen. It is not often that weather is of so much consequence as it was to the people of Bleaburn to-day. They could not themselves have told how it was that they came down from the awful service at Furzy Knoll

so much more light-hearted than they went up; and when some of them were asked the reason, by those who remained below, they could not explain it, — but, somehow, every thing looked brighter. It was, in fact, not merely the calm sunshine on the hills, and the quiet shadows in the hollows; it was not merely the ruddy tinge of the autumn ferns on the slopes, or the lively hop and flit of the wagtail about the spring-heads and the stones in the pool; it was not merely that the fine morning yielded cheering influences like these, but that it enabled many, who would have been kept below by rain, to hear what their new pastor had to say. After going through the burial service very quietly, and waiting with a cheerful countenance while the business of lowering so many coffins by so few hands was effected, he addressed, in a plain and conversational style, those who were present. He told them that he had never before witnessed an interment like this; and he did not at all suppose that either he or they should see such another. Indeed,

henceforth any funerals must take place without delay; as they very well might, now that, on this beautiful spot, there was room without limit. He told them how Farmer Neale had had the space they saw staked out since yesterday, and how it would be fenced in, — roughly, perhaps, but securely, — before night. He hoped and believed the worst of the sickness was over. The cold weather was coming on; and perhaps, he said with a smile, it might be a comfort to some of them to know that the comet was going away. He could not say for himself that he should not be sorry when it disappeared; for he thought it a very beautiful sight, and one which reminded every eye that saw it how “the heavens declare the glory of God”; and the wisest men were all agreed that it was a sign, not of any mischief, but of the beauty of God’s handiwork in the firmament, as the Scriptures call the starry sky. The fact was, it was found that comets come round regularly, like some of the other stars and our own moon; and when a comet had once

been seen, people of a future time would know when to look for it again, and would be too wise to be afraid of it. But he had better tell them about such things at another time, when perhaps they would let their children come up to his house, and look through a telescope, — a glass that magnified things so much, that when they saw the stars, they would hardly believe they were the same stars that they saw every clear night. Perhaps they might then think the commonest star as wonderful as any comet. Another reason why they might hope for better health was, that people at a distance now knew more of the distress of Bleaburn than they had done; and he could assure his neighbors, that supplies of nourishing food and wholesome clothing would be lodged with the cordon till the people of the place could once more earn their own living. Another reason why they might hope for better health was, that they were learning by experience what was good for health and what was bad. This was a very serious and important subject, on which he

would speak to them again and again, on Sundays and at all times, till he had shown them what he thought about their having, he might almost say, their lives and health in their own hands. He was sure that God had ordered it so; and he expected to be able to prove to them, by and by, that there need to be no fever in Bleaburn if they chose to prevent it. And now, about these Sundays and week-days. He deeply pitied them that they had been cut off from worship during their time of distress. He thought there might be an end to that now. He would not advise their assembling in the church. There were the same reasons against it that there were two months ago; but there was no place on earth where men might not worship God, if they wished it. If it were now the middle of summer, he should say that the spot they were standing on — even yet so fresh and so sunny — was the best they could have; but soon the winter winds would blow, and the cold rains would come driving over the hills. This would not do; but there was a warm nook

in the hollow, — the crag behind the mill, — where there was shelter from the east and north, and the warmest sunshine ever felt in the hollow, — too hot in summer, but very pleasant now. There he proposed to read prayers three times a week, at an hour which should be arranged according to the convenience of the greatest number; and there he would perform service and preach a sermon on Sundays, when the weather permitted. He should have been inclined to ask Farmer Neale for one of his barns, or to propose to meet even in his kitchen; but he found his neighbors still feared that meeting anywhere but in the open air would spread the fever. He did not himself believe that one person gave the fever to another; but as long as his neighbors thought so, he would not ask them to do what might make them afraid. Then there was a settling what hours should be appointed for worship at the crag; and the mourners came trooping down into the hollow, with brightened eyes, and freshened faces, and altogether much less like mourners than when they went up.

Before night, Mr. Kirby had visited every sick person in the place, in company with the doctor. The poor doctor would hardly have ventured to go his round without the assistance of some novelty that might divert the attention of the people from his atrocities. Mr. Kirby did not attempt to get rid of the subject. He told the discontented, to their faces, that the doctor knew his business better than they did; and bade them remember that it was not the doctor, but themselves, that had set fire to spirits of wine, or something of that sort, in the middle of the street, whereby a woman was in imminent danger of being burnt to death; and that their outrage on the good fame and property of a gentleman who had worn himself half dead with fatigue and anxiety on their account might yet cost them very dear, if it were not understood that they were so oppressed with sorrow and want that they did not know what they were about. His consultations with the doctor from house to house, and his evident deference to him in regard to matters of health

and sickness, wrought a great change in a few hours; and the effect was prodigiously increased when Mrs. Kirby, herself a surgeon's daughter, and no stranger in a surgery, offered her daily assistance in making up the medicines, and administering such as might be misused by those who could not read the labels.

"That is what the Good Lady does, when she can get out at the right time," observed some one; "but now poor Jem is down, and his mother hardly up again yet, it is not every day, as she says, that she can go so far out of call."

"Who is this Good Lady?" inquired Mr. Kirby. "I have been hardly twenty-four hours in this place, and I seem to have heard her name fifty times; and yet nobody seems able to say who she is."

"She almost overpowers their faculties, I believe," replied the doctor; "and, indeed, it is not very easy to look upon her as upon any other young lady. It comes easier to one's tongue to call her an angel than to introduce her as Miss Mary Pickard, from America."

When he had told what he knew of her, the Kirbys said, in the same breath,

“Let us go and see her.” And the doctor showed them the way to Widow Johnson’s, where poor Jem was languishing, in that state which is so affecting to witness, when he who has no intellect seems to have more power of patience than he who has most. The visitors arrived at a critical moment, however, when poor Jem’s distress was very great, and his mother’s hardly less. There lay the Good Lady on the ground, doubled up in a strange sort of way; Mrs. Johnson trying to go to her, but unable; and Jem, on his bed in the closet within, crying because something was clearly the matter.

“What ’s to do now?” exclaimed the doctor.

Mary laughed as she answered, “O, nothing, but that I can’t get up. I don’t know how I fell, and I can’t get up. But it is mere fatigue, — want of sleep. Do convince Auntie that I have not got the fever.”

“Let’s see,” said the doctor. Then, after a short study of his new patient, he assured

Mrs. Johnson that he saw no signs of fever about her niece. She had had enough of nursing for the present, and now she must have rest.

"That is just it," said Mary. "If somebody will put something under me here, and just let me sleep for a few days, I shall do very well."

"Not there, Miss Pickard," said Mrs. Kirby, "you must be brought to our house, where every thing will be quiet about you; and then you may sleep on till Christmas, if you will."

Mary felt the kindness; but she evidently preferred remaining where she was; and, with due consideration, she was indulged. She did not wish to be carried through the street, so that the people might see that the Good Lady was down at last; and besides, she felt as if she should die by the way, though really believing she should do very well if only let alone. She was allowed to order things just as she liked. A mattress was put under her on the floor. Ann Warrender came and undressed her, lifting her

limbs as if she was an infant, for she could not move them herself; and daily was she refreshed, as she had taught others to refresh those who cannot move from their beds. Every morning the doctor came, and agreed with her that there was nothing in the world the matter with her; that she had only to lie still till she felt the wish to get up; and every day came Mrs. Kirby to take a look at her, if her eyes were closed; and if she was able to talk and listen, to tell her how the sick were faring, and what were the prospects of Bleaburn. After these visits, something good was often found near the pillow; some firm jelly, or particularly pure arrowroot, or the like; odd things to be dropped by the fairies; but Mrs. Kirby said the neighbors liked to think that the Good Lady was waited on by the Good People.

Another odd thing was, that for several days Mary could not sleep at all. She would have liked it, and she needed it extremely, and the window-curtain was drawn, and every body was very quiet, and even

poor Jem caught the trick of quietness, and lay immovable for hours, when the door of his closet was open, watching to see her sleep. But she could not. She felt, what was indeed true, that Aunt's large black eyes were for ever fixed upon her; and she could not but be aware that the matter of the very first public concern in Bleaburn was, that she should go to sleep; and this was enough to prevent it. At last, when people were getting frightened, and even the doctor told Mr. Kirby that he should be glad to correct this insomnolence, the news went softly along the street one day, told in whispers even at the further end, that the Good Lady was asleep. The children were warned that they must keep within doors, or go up to the brow to play; there must be no noise in the hollow. The dogs were not allowed to bark, nor the ducks to quack; and Farmer Neale's carts were on no account to go below the Plough and Harrow. The patience of all persons who liked to make a noise was tried and proved, for nobody broke the rule; and when Mary

once began sleeping, it seemed as if she would never stop. She could hardly keep awake to eat, or to be washed; and as for having her hair brushed, that is always drowsy work, and she could never look before her for two minutes together while it was done. She thought it all very ridiculous, and laughed at her own laziness, and then, before the smile was off her lips, she had sunk on her pillow and was asleep again.

CHAPTER VII.



It was a regular business now for three or four of the boys of Bleaburn to go up to the brow every morning to bring down the stores from O——, which were daily left there under the care of the watch. Mr. Kirby had great influence already with the boys of Bleaburn. He found plenty for them to do, and, when they were very hungry with running about, he gave them wholesome food to satisfy their healthy appetite. He said, he and Mrs. Kirby and the doctor worked hard, and they could not let any body be idle but those who were ill: and, now that the regular work and wages of the place were suspended, he arranged matters after his own sense of the needs of the people. The boys who survived and

were in health, formed a sort of regiment under his orders, and they certainly never liked work so well before. Every little fellow felt his own consequence, and was aware of his own responsibility. A certain number, as has been said, went up to the brow to bring down the stores. A certain number were to succeed each other at the doctor's door, from hour to hour, to carry medicines, that the sick might neither be kept waiting, nor be liable to be served with the wrong medicine, from too many sorts being carried in a basket together. Others attended upon Warrender, with pail and brush, and helped him with his lime-washing. At first it was difficult, as has been said, to induce the lads to volunteer for this service, and Mr. Kirby directed much argument and persuasion towards their supposed fear of entering the cottages where people were lying sick. This was not the reason, however, as Warrender explained, with downcast eyes, when Mr. Kirby wondered what ailed the lads, that they ran all sorts of dangers all day long, and shirked this one.

"'T is not the danger, I fancy, Sir," said Warrender; "they are not so much afraid of the fever as of going with me, I'm sorry to say."

"Afraid of you!" said Mr. Kirby, laughing. "What harm could you do them?"

"'T is my temper, Sir, I'm afraid."

"What is the matter with your temper? I see nothing amiss with it."

"And I hope you never may, Sir: but I can't answer for myself, though at this moment I know the folly of such passion as these lads have seen in me. Sir, it has been my way to be violent with them; and I don't wonder they slink away from me. But —"

"I am really quite surprised," said Mr. Kirby. "This is all news to me. I should have said you were a remarkably staid, quiet, persevering man; and, I am sure, very kind-hearted."

"You have seen us all at such a time, you know, Sir! It is not only the misfortunes of the time that sober us, but when there is so much to do for one's neighbors,

one's mind does not want to be in a passion, — so to speak."

"Very true. The best part of us is roused, and puts down the worse. I quite agree with you, Warrender."

The boys were not long in learning that there was nothing now to fear from Warrender. No one was sent staggering from a box on the ear. No hair was ever pulled; nor was any boy ever shaken in his jacket. Instead of doing such things, Warrender made companions of his young assistants, taught them to do well whatever they put their hands to, and made them willing and happy. While two or three thus waited on him, others carried home the clean linen that his daughter and a neighbor or two were frequently ready to send out: and they daily changed the water in the tubs where the foul linen was deposited. Others, again, swept and washed down the long, steep street, making it look almost as clean as if it belonged to a Dutch village. After the autumn pig-killing, there were few or no more pigs. The poor sufferers

could not attend to them ; could not afford, indeed, to buy them ; and had scarcely any food to give them. Though this was a token of poverty, it was hardly to be lamented in itself, under the circumstances ; for there is no foulness whatever, no nastiness that is to be found among the abodes of men so dangerous to health as that of pigsties. There is mismanagement in this. People take for granted that the pig is a dirty animal, and give him no chance of being clean ; whereas, if they would try the experiment of keeping his house swept, and putting his food always in one place, and washing him with soap and water once a week, they would find that he knows how to keep his pavement clean, and that he runs grunting to meet his washing with a satisfaction not to be mistaken. Such was the conclusion of the boys who undertook the purification of the two or three pigs that remained in Bleaburn. As for the empty sties, they were cleaner than many of the cottages. After a conversation with Mr. Kirby, Farmer Neale bought all the

dirt-heaps for manure; and in a few days they were all trundled away in barrows, — even to the stable-manure from the Plough and Harrow, — and heaped together at the farm, and well shut down with a casing of earth, beat firm with spades. Boys really like such work as this, when they are put upon it in the right way. They were less dirty than they would have been with tumbling about and quarrelling and cuffing in the filthy street; in a finer glow of exercise; with a far more wholesome appetite; and far more satisfaction in eating, because they had earned their food. Moreover, they began to feel themselves little friends of the grown people, — of Mr. and Mrs. Kirby, and the Doctor, and the Warrenders, — instead of a sort of reptiles, or other plague; and Mr. Kirby astonished them so by a bit of amusement now and then, when he had time, that they would have called him a conjurer, if he had not been a clergyman. He made a star — any star they pleased — as large as the comet, just by making them look at it through a tube;

and he showed them how he took a drop of foul water from a stinking pool, and put it between glasses in a hole in his window-shutter; and how the drop became like a pond, and was found to be swarming with loathsome live creatures, swimming about, and trying to swallow each other. After these exhibitions, it is true the comet seemed much less wonderful and terrible than before; but then the drop of water was infinitely more so. The lads studied Mr. Kirby's cistern, — so carefully covered, and so regularly cleaned out; and they learned how the water he drank at dinner was filtered; and then they went and scoured out the few water-tubs there were in the village, and consulted their neighbors as to how the public of Bleaburn could be persuaded not to throw filth and refuse into the stream at the upper part, defiling it for those who lived lower down.

One morning at the beginning of December, — on such a morning as was now sadly frequent, drizzly, and far too warm for the season, — the lads who went up to the

brow saw the same sight that had been visible in the same place one evening in the preceding August. There was a chaise, and an anxious postboy, and a lady talking with one of the cordon. Mr. Kirby had learned what friends Mary Pickard had in England, and which of them lived nearest, and he had taken the liberty of writing to declare the condition of the Good Lady. His letter brought the friend, Mrs. Henderson, who came charged with affectionate messages to Mary from her young daughters, and a fixed determination not to return without the invalid.

“To think,” as she said to Mary when she appeared by the side of her mattress, “that you should be in England, suffering in this way, and we not have any idea what you were going through!”

Mary smiled, and said she had gone through nothing terrible on her own account. She might have been at Mr. Kirby's for three weeks past, but that she really preferred being where she was.

“Do not ask her now, Madam, where she

likes to be," said Mr. Kirby, who had been brought down the street by the bustle of a stranger's arrival. "Do not consult her at all, but take her away, and nurse her well."

"Yes," said the Doctor; "lay her in a good air, and let her sleep, and feed her well; and she will soon come round. She is better, even here."

"Madam," said Widow Johnson's feeble but steady voice, "be to her what she has been to us; raise her up to what she was when I first heard her step upon those stairs, and we shall say you deserve to be her friend."

"You will go, will not you?" whispered Mrs. Kirby to Mary. "You will let us manage it all for you?"

"Do what you please with me," was the reply. "You know best how to get me well soonest. Only let me tell Aunty that I will come again as soon as I am able."

"Better not," said the prudent Mrs. Kirby. "There is no saying what may be the condition of this place by the spring. And it might keep Mrs. Johnson in a state of

expectation not fit for one so feeble. Better not."

"Very well," said Mary.

Mrs. Kirby thought of something that her husband had said of Mary; that he had never seen any one with such power of will and command so docile. She merely promised her aunt frequent news of her; agreed with those who doubted whether she could bear the jolting of any kind of carriage on the road up to the brow; admitted that, though she could now stand, she could not walk across the room; allowed herself to be carried on her mattress in a carpet, by four men, up to the chaise; and nodded in reply to a remark made by one little girl to another in the street, and which the doctor wished she had not heard, that she looked "rarely bad."

The landlady at O—— seemed, by her countenance, to have much the same opinion of Mary's looks, when she herself brought out the glass of wine, for which Mrs. Henderson stopped her chaise at the door of the Cross Keys. The landlady

brought it herself, because none of her people would give as much as a glass of cold water, hand to hand with any one who came from Bleaburn. The landlady stood shaking her head, and saying she had done the best she could; she had warned the young lady in time.

"But you were quite out in your warning," said Mary. "You were sure I should have the fever: but I have not."

"You have not!"

"I have had no disease, — no complaint whatever. I am only weak from fatigue."

"It is quite true," said Mrs. Henderson, as the hostess turned to her for confirmation. "Good wine like this, the fresh air of our moors, and the easy sleep that comes to Good Ladies like her, are the only medicines she wants."

The landlady curtsied low, — said the payment made should supply a glass of wine to somebody at Bleaburn, and bade the driver proceed. After a mile or two, he turned his head, touched his hat, and directed the ladies' attention to a bottle of

wine, with loosened cork, and a cup, which the hostess had contrived to smuggle into the pocket of the chaise. She was sure the young lady would want some wine before they stopped.

“How kind every body is!” said Mary, with swimming eyes. Mrs. Henderson cleared her throat, and looked out of the window on her side.

CHAPTER VIII.



THE spectacle of carrying the Good Lady up to the brow was more terrifying to the people of Bleaburn than any of the funerals they had seen creeping along by the same path,—more even than the passage of the laden cart, with the pall over it, on the morning of the opening of the new burying-ground. The people of Bleaburn, extremely ignorant, were naturally extremely superstitious. It was not only the very ignorant who were superstitious. The fever itself was never supposed to be more catching than a mood of superstition; and so it now appeared in Bleaburn. For many weeks past the Good Lady had been regarded as a sort of talisman in the people's possession.

She breathed out such cheerfulness whenever she turned her face, that it seemed as if the place could not go quite to destruction while she was in it. Some who would not have admitted to themselves that they held such an impression, were yet infected with the common dismay, as well as with the sorrow of parting with her. If Mary had had the least idea of the probable effect of her departure, she would have been less admired by the Kirbys for her docility, for she would certainly have insisted on staying where she was.

"I declare I don't know what to do," the doctor confessed in confidence to the clergyman. "Every patient I have is drooping, and the people in the streets look like creatures under doom. The comet was bad enough; and, before we have well done with it, here is a panic which is ten times worse."

"I tried to lend a hand to help you against the comet," replied Mr. Kirby. "I think I may be of some use again now. Shall I tell them it is a clear case of idolatry?"

"Why, it is in fact so, Mr. Kirby; but yet I shrink from appearing to cast the slightest disrespect on her."

"Of course; of course. The thing I want to show them is, what she would think,—how shocked she would be if she knew the state of mind she left behind."

"Ah! if you can do that!"

"I will see about it. Now tell me how we are going on."

The doctor replied by a look, which made Mr. Kirby shake his head. Neither of them liked to say in words how awful was the state of things.

"It is such weather, you see," said the doctor. "Damp and disagreeable as it is, this December is as warm as September."

"Five-and-twenty sorts of flowers out in my garden," observed Mr. Kirby. "I set the boys to count them yesterday. We shall have as many as that on Christmas-day. A thing unheard of!"

"There will be no Christmas kept this year, surely," said the doctor.

"I don't know that. My wife and I were

talking it over yesterday. We think — Well, my boy," to a little boy who stood pulling his forelock, "what have you to say to me? I am wanted at home, am I? Is Mrs. Kirby there?"

The doctor heard him say to himself, "Thank God!" when they saw the lady coming out of a cottage near. The doctor had long suspected that the clergyman and his wife were as sensible of one another's danger as the most timid person in Bleaburn was of his own; and now he was sure of it. Henceforth, he understood that they were never easy out of one another's sight; and that when the clergyman was sent for from the houses he was passing, his first idea always was that his wife was taken ill. It was so. They were not people of sentiment. They had settled their case with readiness and decision, when it first presented itself to them; and they never looked back. But it did not follow that they did not feel. They agreed, with the smallest possible delay, that they ought to succeed to the charge of Bleaburn on

Mr. Finch's death; that they ought to place their boys at school, and their two girls with their aunt, till Bleaburn should be healthy again; and that they must stand or fall by the duty they had undertaken. As for separating, that was an idea mentioned only to be dismissed. They now nodded across the little street, as Mrs. Kirby proceeded on her round of visits, and her husband went home, to see who wanted him there.

In the corner of the little porch was a man sitting, crouching and covering as if in bodily pain. Mr. Kirby went up to him, stooped down to see his face (but it was covered with his hands), and at last ventured to remove his hat. Then the man looked up. It was a square, hard face, which, from its make, would have seemed immovable; but it was any thing but that now. It is a strange sight, the working of emotion in a countenance usually as hard as marble!"

"Neale!" exclaimed Mr. Kirby. "Somebody ill at the farm, I am afraid."

“Not yet, Sir; not yet, Mr. Kirby. But Lord save us! we know nothing of how soon it may be so.”

“Exactly so: that has been the case of every man, woman, and child, hour by hour, since Adam fell.”

“Yes, Sir; but the present time is something different from that. I came, Sir, to say — I came, Mr. Kirby, because I can get no peace or rest, day or night; for thoughts, Sir; for thoughts.”

Mr. Kirby glanced round him. “Come in,” said he; “come into my study.”

Neale followed him in; but instead of sitting down, he walked straight to the window, and seemed to be looking into the garden. Mr. Kirby, who had been on foot all the morning, sat down and waited, shaving away at a pen meanwhile.

“On Sunday, Sir,” said Neale at last, in a whispering kind of voice, “you read that I have kept back the hire of the laborers that reaped down my fields, and that their cry has entered into the ears of the Lord.”

“That *you* kept back the hire of the la-

borer?" exclaimed Mr. Kirby, quickly turning in his seat, so as to face his visitor. He laid his hand on the pocket Bible on the table, opened at the Epistle of James, and, with his finger on the line, walked to the window with it.

"Yes, Sir, that is it," said Neale. "I would return the hire I kept back, — (I can't exactly say by fraud, for it was from hardness,) — I would pay it all willingly now; but the men are dead. The fever has left but a few of them."

"I see," said Mr. Kirby. "I see how it is. You think the fever is dogging your heels, because the cries of your laborers have entered into the ears of the Lord. You want to buy off the complaints of the dead, and the anger of God, by spending now on the living. You are afraid of dying; and you would rather part with your money, dearly as you love it, than die; and so you are planning to bribe God to let you live."

"Is not that rather hard, Sir?"

"Hard? — Is it true? that is the question."

When they came to look closely into the matter, it was clear enough. Neale, driven from his accustomed methods and employments, and from his profits, and all his outward reliances, was adrift and panic-stricken. When the Good Lady was carried out of the hollow, the last security seemed gone, and the place appeared to be delivered over to God's wrath; his share of which, his conscience showed him to be pointed out in the words of Scripture which had so impressed his mind, and which were ringing in his ears, as he said, day and night.

"As for the Good Lady," said Mr. Kirby, "I am sure I hope she will never hear how some of the people here regard her, after all she has done for them. If any thing could bow her spirit, it would be that." Seeing Neale stare in surprise, he went on. "One would think she was a kind of witch or sorceress; that there was some sort of magic about it; instead of her being a sensible, kind-hearted, fearless woman, who knows how to nurse, and is

not afraid to do it when it is most wanted."

"Don't you think, then, Sir, that God sent her to us?"

"Certainly; as he sent the doctor, and my wife and me: as he sends people to each other whenever they meet. I am sure you never heard the Good Lady say that she was specially sent."

"She is so humble, — so natural, Sir, — she was not likely to say such a thing."

"Very true: and she is too wise to think it. No, — there is nothing to be frightened about in her going away. She could have done no good here, while unable to walk or sit up; and she will recover better where she is gone. If she recovers, as I expect she will, she will come and see us; and I shall think that as good luck as you can do; not because she carries luck about with her, but because there is nothing we so much want as her example of courage, and sense and cheerfulness."

"To be sure," said Neale, in a meditative way, "she could not keep the people from dying."

“No, indeed,” observed Mr. Kirby; “you and some others took care that she should not.”

In reply to the man’s stare of amazement, Mr. Kirby asked, —

“Are not you the proprietor of several of the cottages in Bleaburn?”

“Yes; I have seven altogether.”

“I know them well, — too well. Neale, your conscience accuses you about the hire of your laborers: but you have done worse things than oppress them about wages. Part of the mischief you may be unaware of; but I know you are not of all. I know that Widow Slaney speaks to you, year by year, about repairing that wretched place she lives in. Have you done it yet? Not you! I need not have asked; and yet you screw that poor woman for her rent till she cannot sleep at night for thinking of it. You know in your heart that what she says is true, — that if her son was alive, — (and it was partly your hardness that sent him to the wars, and to his terrible fate) — ”

“Stop, Sir! I cannot bear it!” exclaimed Neale. “Sir, you should not bear so hard on me. I have a son that met another bad fate at the wars: and you know it, Mr. Kirby.”

“To be sure I do. And how do you treat him? . You drove him away by harshness; and now you say he shall not come back, because you cannot be troubled with a cripple at home.”

“Not now, Sir. I say no such thing now. When I said that, I was in a bad mood. I mean to be kind to him now: and I have told him so;—that is, I have said so to the girl he is attached to.”

“You have? You have really seen her, and shown respect to the young people?”

“I have, Sir.”

“Well: that is so far good. That is some foundation laid for a better future.”

“I should be thankful, Sir, to make up for the past.”

“Ah!” said Mr. Kirby, shaking his head; “that is what can never be done. The

people, as you say, are dead : the misery is suffered : the mischief is done, and cannot be undone. It is a lie, and a very fatal one, to say that past sins may be atoned for."

" O Mr. Kirby ! don't say that ! "

" I must say it, because it is true. You said yourself, that you cannot make it up to those you have injured, because the men are dead. What is that you are saying ? that you wish the fever had taken you ; and you could go now and shoot yourself ? Before you dare to say such things, you should look at the other half of the case. Is not the future greater than the past, because we have power over it ? And is there not a good text somewhere about forgetting the things that are behind, and pressing forwards to those that are before ? "

" O, Sir ! if I could forget the past ! "

" Well, you see you have Scripture warrant for trying. But then the pressing forwards to better things must go with it. If you forget the past, and go on the same

as ever, you might as well be in hell at once. Then, I don't know that your shooting yourself would do much harm to any body."

"But, Sir, I am willing to do all I can. I am willing to spend all I have. I am, indeed."

"Well, spend away, — money, time, thought, kindness, — till you can fairly say that you have done by every body as you would be done by! It will be time enough then to think what next. And, first, about these cottages of yours. If no more people are to die in them, murdered by filth and damp, you have no time to lose. You must not sit here, talking remorse, and planning fine deeds, but you must set the work going this very day. Come! let us go and see."

Farmer Neale walked rather feebly through the hall: so Mr. Kirby called him into the parlor, and gave him a glass of wine. Still, as they went down the street, one man observed to another, that Neale looked ten years older in a day. He looked

round him, however, with some signs of returning spirits, when he saw the boys at their street-cleaning, and observed, that hereabouts things looked wholesome enough.

“ Mere outside scouring,” said Mr. Kirby. “ Better than dirt, as far as it goes ; unless, indeed, it makes us satisfied to have whited sepulchres for dwellings. Come and see the uncleanness within.”

Mr. Kirby did not spare him. He took him through all the seven cottages, for which he had extorted extravagant rents, without fulfilling any conditions on his own part. He showed him every bit of broken roof, of damp wall, of soaked floor. He showed him every heap of filth, every puddle of nastiness caused by there being no drains, or other means of removal of refuse. He advised him to make a note of every repair needed ; and, when he saw that Neale’s hand shook so that he could not write, took the pencil from his hand and did it himself. Two of the seven cottages he condemned utterly : and Neale

eagerly agreed to pull them down, and rebuild them with every improvement requisite to health. To the others he would supply what was wanting, and especially drainage. They stood in such a cluster that it was practicable to drain them all into a gully of the rock, which, by being covered over, by a little building up at one end, and a little blasting at one side, might be made into a considerable tank, which was to be closed by a tight-fitting and very heavy slab at top. Mr. Kirby conceded so much to the worldly spirit of the man he had to deal with, as to point out that the manure thus saved would so fertilize his fields as soon to repay the cost of this batch of drainage. Neale did not care for this at the moment. He was too sore at heart at the spectacle of these cottages and their inmates, — too much shaken by remorse and fear, — for any idea of profit and loss : but Mr. Kirby thought it as well to point out the fact, as it might help to animate the hard man to proceed in a good work, when his present melting mood should be passing away.

“ Well : I think this is all we can do to-day,” said Mr. Kirby, as they issued from the seventh cottage. “ The worst of it is, the workmen from O—— will not come, — I am afraid no builder will come, even to make an estimate, — till we are declared free of fever. But there is a good deal that your own people can do.”

“ They can knock on a few slates before dark, Sir ; and those windows can be mended to-day. I trust, Mr. Kirby, you will give me encouragement ; and not be harder than you can help.”

“ Why, Neale ; the thing is this. You do not hold your doom from my hand ; and you ought not to hang upon my words. You come to me to tell me what you feel, and to ask what I think. All I can do is to be honest with you, and (as indeed I am) sorry for you. Time must do the rest. If you are now acting well from fear of the fever only, time will show you how worthless is the effort ; for you will break off as soon as the fright has passed away. If you really mean to do

justly and love mercy, through good and bad fortune, time will prove you there, too: and then you will see whether I am hard, or whether we are to be friends. This is my view of the matter."

Neale touched his hat, and was slowly going away, when Mr. Kirby followed him, to say one thing more.

"It may throw light to yourself, on your own state of mind, to tell you that it is quite a usual one among people who have deeply sinned, when any thing happens to terrify them. Histories of earthquakes and plagues tell of people thinking and feeling as you do to-day. I dare say you think nobody ever felt the same before; but you are not the only one in Bleaburn."

"Indeed, Sir!" exclaimed Neale, exceedingly struck.

"Far from it. A person who has often robbed your poultry-yard, and taken your duck-eggs, thought that I was preaching at him last Sunday; though I knew nothing about it. He wished to make reparation; and he asked me if I thought you would

forgive him. Do you really wish to know my answer? I told him I thought you would not: but that he must confess and make reparation, nevertheless."

"You thought I should not forgive him?"

"I did: and I think so now, thus far. You would say and believe that you forgave him: but, at odd times, for years to come, you would show him that you had not forgotten it, and remind him that you had a hold over him. If not,—if I do you injustice in this, I should——"

"You do not, Sir. I am afraid what you say is very true."

"Well, just think it over before he comes to you. This is the only confession made to me which it concerns you to hear: but I assure you, I believe there is not an evil-doer in Bleaburn that is not sick at heart as you are; and for the same reason. We all have our pains and troubles; and yours may turn out a great blessing to you,—or a curse, according as you persevere or give way."

Neale said to himself, as he went home, that Mr. Kirby had surely been very hard. If a man hanged for murder was filled with hope and triumph, and certainty of glory, there must be some more speedy comfort for him than the pastor had held out. Yet, in his inmost heart, he felt that Mr. Kirby was right; and he could not, for the life of him, keep away from him. He managed to meet him every day. He could seldom get a word said about the state of his mind; for Mr. Kirby did not approve of people's talking of their feelings,—and especially of those connected with conscience: but in the deeds which issued from conscientious feelings, he found cordial assistance given. And Farmer Neale sometimes fancied that he could see the time,—far as it was ahead,—when Mr. Kirby and he might be, as the pastor had himself said, friends.

The amount of confession and remorse opened out to the pastor was indeed striking, and more affecting to him than he chose to show to any body but his wife;

and not even to her did he tell many of the facts. The mushroom resolutions spawned in the heat of panic were offensive and discouraging to him: but there were better cases than these. A man who had taken into wrath with a neighbor about a gate, and had kept so for years, and refused to go to church lest he should meet him there, now discovered that life is too short for strife, and too precarious to be wasted in painful quarrels. A little girl whispered to Mr. Kirby that she had taken a turnip in his field without leave, and got permission to weed the great flower-bed without pay, to make up for it. Simpson and Sally asked him to marry them; and for poor Sally's sake he was right glad to do it. They were straightforward enough in their declaration of their reasons. Simpson thought nobody's life was worth a half-penny now, and he did not wish to be taken in his sins: while Sally said it would be worse still if the innocent baby was taken for its parents' sin. They had to hear the publication of banns, at a time

when other people were thinking of any thing but marriage; and when the now disused church was unlocked to admit them to the altar,—just themselves and the clerk,—it was very dreary; but they immediately after felt the safer and better for it. Sally thought the Good Lady would have gone to church with her, if she had been here; and she wished she could let her know that Simpson had fulfilled his promise at last. Other people besides Sally wished they could let the Good Lady know how they were going on;—how frost came at last, in January, and stopped the fever;—how families who had lived crowded together now spread themselves into the empty houses; and how there was so much room that the worst cottages were left uninhabited, or were already in course of demolition, to make airy spaces, or afford sites for better dwellings; and how it was now certain that above two thirds of the people of Bleaburn had perished in the fever, or by decline, after it. But they did not think of

getting any body who could write to tell all this to the Good Lady : nor did it occur to them that she might possibly know it all. The men and boys collected pretty spars for her ; and the women and girls knitted gloves and comforters, and made pineushions for her, in the faith that they should some day see her again. Meanwhile, they talked of her every day.

CHAPTER IX.



It was a fine spring day when the Good Lady reappeared at Bleaburn. There she was, perfectly well, and glad to see health on so many of the faces about her. Some were absent whom she had left walking about in the strength of their prime; but others whom she had last seen lying helpless, like living skeletons, were now on their feet, with a light in their eyes, and some little tinge of color in their cheeks. There were sad spectacles to be seen of premature decrepitude, of dreadful sores, of deafness, of lameness, left by the fever. There were enough of these to have saddened the heart of any stranger entering Bleaburn for the first time, but to Mary the impression was that of a place risen

from the dead. There was much grass in the churchyard, and none in the streets: the windows of the cottages were standing wide, letting it be seen that the rooms were whitewashed within. There was an indescribable air of freshness and brightness about the whole place, which made her feel and say that she hardly thought the fever could harbor there again. As she turned into the lane leading to her aunt's, the sound of the hammer and the chipping of stone were heard; and some workmen whom she did not know turned from their work of planing boards, to see why a crowd could be coming round the corner. These were workmen from O——, building Neale's new cottages, in capital style. And, for a moment, two young ladies entering from the other end were equally perplexed as to what the extraordinary bustle could mean. Their mother, however, understood it at a glance, and hastened forward to greet the Good Lady, sending a boy to fetch Mr. Kirby immediately. Mrs. Kirby's dryness of manner broke down

altogether when she introduced her daughters to Mary. "Let them say they have shaken hands with you," said she, as she herself kissed the hand she held.

It was not easy for Mary to spare a hand, so laden was she with pincushions and knitted wares; but the Kirbys took them from her, and followed in her train, till the Widow Johnson appeared on her threshold, pale as marble, and grave as a monument, but well, and able to hold out her arms to Mary. Poor Jem's excitement seemed to show that he was aware that some great event was happening. His habits were the same as before his illness, and he had no peace till he had shut the door when Mary entered. Everybody then went away for the time; plenty of eyes, however, being on the watch for the moment when the Good Lady should be visible again.

In a few minutes, the movements of Jem's head showed his mother that, as she said, something was coming. Jem's hearing was uncommonly acute: and what he now heard, and what other people heard directly after,

was a drum and fife. Neighbor after neighbor came to tell the Johnsons what their ears had told them already,— that there was a recruiting party in Bleaburn again; and Jem went out, attracted by the music.

“It is like the candle to the moth to him,” said his mother. “I must go and see that nobody makes sport of him, or gives him drink.”

“Sit still, Aunt; I will go. And there is Warrender, I see, and Ann. We will take care of Jem.”

And so they did. Ann looked so meaningly at Mary, meantime, as to make Mary look inquiringly at Ann.

“Only, ma’am,” said Ann, “that Sally Simpson is standing yonder. She does not like to come forward, but I know she would be pleased.”

“Her name is Simpson? How glad I am he has married her!” whispered Mary, as she glanced at the ring which Sally was rather striving to show. “I hope you are happy at last, Sally.”

“Oh, ma’am, it is such a weight gone!

And I do try to make him happy at home, that he may never repent."

Mary thought the doubt should be all the other way, — whether the wife might not be the most likely to repent having bound herself to a man who could act towards her as Simpson had done. Widow Slaney was not to be seen. The fife and drum had sent her to the loft. She came down to see Mary; but her agitation was so great, that it would have been cruelty to stay. They heard her draw the bolt as they turned from the door.

"She does not like seeing Jack Neale any more than hearing the drum," observed the host of the Plough and Harrow, who had come forth to invite the Good Lady in, 'to take a glass of something.' "That is Jack Neale, ma'am; that wooden-legged young man. He is married, though, for all his being so crippled. The young woman loved him before; and she loves him all the more now; and they married last week, and live at his father's. It must be a sad sight to his father; but he says no word

about it. Better not; for Britons must be loyal."

"And why not?" said the doctor, who had hastened in from the brow, on seeing that something unusual was going forward below, and had ventured to offer the Good Lady his arm, as he thought an old comrade in the conflict with sickness and death might do.

"Why not?" said the doctor. "We make grievous complaints of the fatality of war; and it is sad to see the maiming and hear of the slaughter. But we had better spend our lamentations on a fatality that we can manage. It would take many a battle of Albuera to mow us down, and hurt us in sense and limb, as the fever has done."

"Why, that is true!" cried some, as if struck by a new conviction.

"True, yes," continued the doctor. "I don't like the sight of a recruiting party or the sound of the drum much better than the poor woman in yonder house, who will die of heart-break after all, — of horror and

pinning for her son. But there is something that I like still less ; the first giddiness and trembling of the strong man, the sinking feebleness of the young mother, the dimming of the infant's eyes ; and the creeping fog along the river-bank, the stench in the hot weather, and the damp in the cold, that tell us that fever has lodged among us. I know then that we shall have, many times over, the slaughter of war, without any comfort from thoughts of glory to ourselves or duty to our country. There is neither glory nor duty in dying like vermin in a ditch."

"I don't see," said Warrender, "that the sergeant will carry off any of our youngsters now. If he had come with his drum three months since, some might have gone with him to get away from the fever, as a more terrible thing than war ; but at present I think he will find that death has left us no young men to spare."

And so it proved. The sergeant and his party soon marched up to the brow, and disappeared, delivering the prophecy that

Bleaburn would now lose its reputation for eagerness to support king and country. And in truth, Bleaburn was little heard of from that time till the peace.

Mary could not stay now. She had been detained very long from home, — in America, — and somebody was waiting very impatiently there to give her a new and happy home. This is said as if we were speaking of a real person, — and so we are. There was such a Mary Pickard; and what she did for a Yorkshire village in a season of fever is TRUE.

THE END.



14 DAY USE

14 DAY USE
RETURN TO DESK FROM WHICH BORROWED

LOAN DEPT.

This book is due on the last date stamped below, or on the date to which renewed.

Renewed books are subject to immediate recall.

29 May '58 CS

REC'D I.D

MAY 19 1958

23 Oct 59 r C

REC'D LD

NOV 11 1959

NOV 19 1971 68

REC'D LD JUN 9 72-1 AM 5 11

MAY 16 1983

rec'd circ. MAY 8 1983

LD 21A-50m-8,'57
(C8481s10)476B

General Library
University of California
Berkeley

U. C. BERKELEY LIBRARIES



C055053317

M264486

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

111

112

113